OUTLINES OF JOSHUA JUDGES RUTH AND OTHER MINISTRY

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PREFATORY NOTE

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THE BREASTPLATE AND THE LOCAL ASSEMBLIES

Exodus 28: 15—22, 29, 30; Numbers 2: 32—34

C.A.C. I am sure we have all found comfort and strength in thinking of the affectionate interest which the Lord has in us as individual saints. I suppose we have all experienced His succour and help, and have learnt that it is a precious reality that He lives to make intercession for us. But I have been wondering lately whether we have a sufficient sense of the Lord's affectionate interest in us as walking together in local assemblies; I am sure the Lord would give us an impression of His profound interest in us in that character.

In making these remarks I am referring to the fact that there were no names of individuals in the breastplate, but of "tribes," and, as I understand it, each tribe as a type would have its antitype in the local assembly. The Lord would give us a sense of the *speciality* of the way He thinks of us as on assembly ground in each locality.

Paul is in a particular way the representative of Christ, he is the "called apostle of Jesus Christ," and what marked him was great interest in local assemblies. No doubt he was interested in the saints in a general way, but his service, as we have it recorded in Scripture, is largely service to local assemblies. His epistles are nearly all addressed to saints in defined localities—Corinth, Rome, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, etc. In this, I think, he was peculiarly in accord with the heart of Christ, one might say with the stones in the breastplate.

Each assembly is in view as having its own particular character; the tribes as seen in the breastplate were all set together in unity, and they all moved in unity as standing in relation to the tent of meeting—the tabernacle of testimony; but each tribe had its own special place in the

breastplate. I believe every local assembly has a distinct place on the heart of Christ. We may gather this from Revelation 2 and 3, where we have seven assemblies—no doubt representing all the assemblies—and each is addressed as having the special attention of the Lord. It would help us to get before us that the Lord has a peculiar and special interest in each local company.

I am not exactly thinking of all believers in a place, for they are not all in assembly order—divine order in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. I am looking at it in the light of the type before us; the type presents to us the people of God as seen in various companies, that is, in "tribes." If we think of defined companies today it must be the saints viewed in local assemblies; such defined companies are referred to frequently in the New Testament; we read of "the assemblies of the saints"; they are defined companies clearly, but according to the type they are companies all standing in relation to one another in a universal unity, and standing in relation to the tent of meeting, and the tabernacle of testimony. That is clearly the setting of the type; it is not the people of God viewed as every man doing what is right in his own eyes, which is very much the condition of things in the religious world.

In the early part of Numbers things are seen according to divine order, and there is such a thing as an administration according to divine order. It is as having some sense of this that we are walking together; we desire to fall into line with the divine system, to escape from the lawless and disorderly systems which men have brought in, and to find our places locally and generally in the divine system, that system which was typified by the tribes in their ordered and proper places in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. That is the divine idea, and it is with that in view that we are walking together, if we are doing so intelligently and spiritually. We may have come to it in different ways, but that is what we reach if we

reach anything at all according to God as to our position.

We do well to take account of this, and to remember that it puts us in a place where we receive peculiar and affectionate support direct from the heart of Christ. It is in that character typically that we are seen in the breastplate. It would help us to see that the teaching of the type does not refer to individual saints, but to the saints viewed tribally; that is, as definitely set together locally. This regards us as being together locally on true assembly ground; it is either that or what we may call ecclesiastical lawlessness; it is either a human system or the divine system.

We may remember that not only did Israel have twelve sons, but Ishmael also had twelve sons—"twelve princes of their peoples", Gen. 25, representing typically the fact that there would be an administration connected outwardly with Abraham's house, but which takes character from one who will not own the rights of Christ, but who is a mocker when those rights are practically owned. The character of the administration which prevails in the religious world around us, which we have to face and overcome, is largely Ishmaelitish. There is a whole system which has to be cast out as opposed to Christ—an administration which sets up man in the flesh in his varied features. The twelve princes of Ishmael's line were prior to the twelve sons of Israel; the natural precedes the spiritual; but the spiritual is to displace the natural.

We are, I trust, learning to walk together locally as of the Israel of God, in divine order and forming part of the divine system. For those who come to that there is special affectionate interest in the heart of Christ; it goes out to them, because they have found in some small way practically their right place in the divine administration. Each stone—each "tribe"—has its distinctive colour and value in the breastplate. Each tribe is a unit, but all the twelve tribes are set together in a universal unity, represented by the stones being fitted together in settings of gold.

They are put together so that there is no thought suggested of independency; no local assembly is independent; it is divinely linked with every other assembly, yet each one has its own special place in the breastplate.

Ques. Would the sons of Israel and Ishmael be set forth in Philadelphia and Laodicea?

C.A.C. Yes, I think in principle things are headed up there. An administration which is according to the flesh is rejected by God, however pretentious, however it may be able to say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing."

Ques. Would you say that we are entitled to take account in a special way, as according to the mind of the Spirit, of those who gather on assembly ground?

C.A.C. It is evident that the type does not allow for anything else. Every tribe is to be in its defined place, and in its proper relation to all the other tribes. They all have to encamp and move together; no thought of lawlessness is admitted. We cannot find in the type any justification for what is otherwise. If people are lawless and independent and carrying on divine things in a human and natural way, they are clearly not in the divine system in any practical sense; they do not in any way correspond with the stones in the breastplate.

The place of the tribes as seen in Numbers 2 corresponded with the place they had in the breastplate. There are four rows of stones in the breastplate, and in Numbers 2 there are four camps, each composed of three tribes; it is evident that they were preserved in every way from independency. No one tribe could move without its neighbours; then the four camps all moved together in unity, moving first, second, third, or fourth as divinely ordered, but all moving together. That is the practical side of the working out of assembly truth locally, and it is most important that assembly truth should be worked out locally. The devil is not particularly opposed to what is universal so long as it is left abstract and no attempt

made to secure locally what corresponds with it. Many persons are prepared to read books and to enjoy all that is said of the church universally; they believe that the church includes all believers; they take in the universal idea in that sense, but they will not accept that what is universal has to be worked out locally. That is quite another matter because that means a clean break with the Ishmaelitish system, and it means coming in a practical sense into a system that is of God. Every christian would accept, for example, that the Lord Jesus gave His body for all saints, but the test comes when we realise that, in the light of this, we should break bread locally, and take up together the responsibilities that go with the privilege. It is at once felt that difficulties will be encountered which only faith can overcome.

The enemy's point of attack is the local assembly, see Acts 20: 29, 30. His object is, of course, to assail what is universal; but his point of attack is the local assembly; we ought to realise that; it would preserve us from expecting that we are going to have all plain sailing in our local associations; we must expect to find the enemy operating in respect of the local assembly. The enemy will see to it that all kinds of difficulties are encountered that other people do not have. There are difficulties in the working out of the divine system that would not be met with in the Ishmaelitish system. All sorts of things rise up in the local assemblies, but how precious it is to know that in relation to these difficulties we have the affectionate interest of Christ, and we are borne on the heart of Christ in a peculiar way in relation to those very things. It is most encouraging.

The tabernacle was a wonderful system, and every detail in it represented what was spiritual and of God; but it was the tabernacle of testimony; that is, it speaks of God setting things forth in testimony, not in public power. When God does bring in His system publicly, as He will, it will necessitate the *public* setting aside of

everything adverse to it. But God is not doing that now; He is bringing in His system in the way of testimony; bringing it in in such a way that it has to meet all the hostility of the enemy, and it has to be defended by the twelve tribes standing arrayed for military service. So that the position of the tribes around the tabernacle is a militant position. There are enemies all round, on every side of the square, and the testimony of God involves the maintenance of what is of God in the face of everything that is hostile.

Rem. The thought of the testimony is universal, but it needs to be maintained locally.

C.A.C. Yes, that is right; the tabernacle of testimony and the tent of meeting suggest universal thoughts. All the twelve tribes stood in relation to the one tabernacle, so the tabernacle itself represents what is universal. But then everything local, everything tribal, has to stand in relation to it, and our great exercise should be to bring everything local into proper relation to what is universal. The tabernacle, its service, the charge of the sanctuary, are universal things, but things locally have to be brought into right relation to them.

If things are regarded merely in the universal aspect there may be nothing practical or concrete about it, nothing that can be viewed as substantial. A great many people have a notion of the church universally as composed of all saints, and many preach a great deal of the truth of the church, but at the same time they go on locally with the Ishmaelitish system which recognises the natural and the fleshly. It is when the desire is awakened to work out the truth of the assembly locally that the test comes. That is what the devil is *against* and what Christ is *for*; and therefore in a path where we prove the special hostility of Satan it becomes very necessary that we should prove the affectionate support of Christ the Priest.

There is a word in 2 Corinthians 8: 23 that I should like to read: "Whether as regards Titus, he is my companion

and fellow-labourer in your behalf; or our brethren, they are deputed messengers of assemblies, Christ's glory." It would affect us all greatly if we thought of the local assemblies as "Christ's glory." It is very touching. I suppose there are at least twelve little companies represented here this afternoon, and Paul would clothe us with divine thoughts; he would give us to understand that locally we are "Christ's glory," and this not as individuals, but as walking together locally in assembly conditions we are "Christ's glory." In saying this Paul was in accord with the heart of Christ and with the breastplate. It would be from this point of view that he had daily solicitude about "all the assemblies," 2 Cor. 11: 28. Christ's glory is identified with local assemblies. The object of the enemy in all his efforts to produce local eruptions and discords is to assail Christ's glory, and if we kept that in mind it would steady our spirits, and we should be watchful and prayerful that we be not deflected from the way that we are represented in the breastplate. We might gather, I think, from the breastplate that each local assembly, as answering to the typical "tribe," is on the heart of Christ as having some distinctive glory. And every local exercise is permitted and designed in order to bring out that glory. It is intended that the local assembly shall correspond with the precious stone that represents it in the breastplate. The intercession of Christ has that in view; it would support us to that end.

Administrative exercises stand connected with our tribal position. The number twelve, as we have often heard, is the number of administration. We have to distinguish between exercises connected with the sanctuary and exercises connected with the tribes. In the service of the sanctuary, and its charge, all is priestly and levitical. The priests were all levites, and Levi was not in the breastplate. Divine service in praise and worship is not really local; the brethren in Exeter and New York all praise on the same universal notes. Ministry is the same,

whether in Sydney or London, so that what is ministered in one place holds equally good in every other place; but when we come to local exercises in administration they are not everywhere the same, though, of course, all have to be governed by the same universal principles, and the issue reached would be universally the same if precisely the same conditions had to be met; but questions arise in one place which do not arise in another, hence there is variety in administration. The administrative glory of Christ is so great that it could not all be seen in any one local assembly, but the divine thought is that it shall be seen in all the assemblies, as set together in relation to each other and to the tabernacle of testimony, and all in divine unity, whether seen as encamped, or as represented in the precious stones of the breastplate.

In the assemblies as represented by the twelve tribes there is divine administration, and Christ's glory seen in it; we could not get what answers to the number twelve in one individual or even in one assembly. The administration of Christ will be seen in its completeness in the heavenly city, but even there it is a diversified glory. The foundations of its wall have in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, but each one seen as having a distinctive glory. Take the three of them best known to us—Matthew, Peter, and John—how distinctive they are! The glories of the Lamb are diversified; the One who suffered and died is so great, He can be viewed in so many different lights, that His glories could not be set forth administratively in less than twelve men. We realise that each had his own place in setting Him forth.

The administration that will be seen in its completeness in the holy city is to be seen now in the local assemblies, viewed as typically set forth in the twelve tribes surrounding the tent of meeting. Christ's glory is to come into evidence in the way everything is handled, so that a spiritual administration is seen on earth that corresponds with the mind of heaven.

The different questions that arise locally develop Christ's glory in the assemblies. The direct service of God is one thing; His testimony is another; but the assemblies viewed as typified by the tribes are seen in a different relation. We may be sometimes inclined to wish that we had no other exercises save those connected with approach to God! I believe the most testing exercises are those connected with administration, for in taking them up we come into contact with what is not according to God; the 'tribes' have to encamp or move as on 'military service.' The local assemblies are in presence of the actual trying conditions that are here, need amongst the saints, perplexing questions of right and wrong, questions as to whom we can extend fellowship and from whom we are required to withdraw—all enter into this position.

Now it is just these exercises which impart distinctive colour to each local assembly. As to the testimony, the service of God, the ministry—in a word all that is priestly or levitical—it is universal, and all that is administrative has to be worked out in the light of it. But administrative exercises are local, and have to be worked out locally, and when worked out they give distinctive features of Christ's glory which answer to the stones in the breastplate. I think the type—taken in conjunction with the distinctive epistles of the New Testament—would warrant us in holding, for our comfort and encouragement, the precious thought that the assemblies are in the affections of Christ in a distinctive way in relation to their special responsibilities in administration. Whatever question or difficulty arises, Christ's glory is to come out in the way it is met; some particular feature of that glory is to be brought into evidence in each locality according to the occasions that arise locally. In every case, perhaps it might be said, we find ourselves confronted by what is Ishmaelitish; but it has to be met by an administration which suits the Israel of God, which brings Christ's glory into evidence.

If the enemy knew how these things were going to work

out he would leave us alone. Every local exercise and sorrow is divinely intended to work out Christ's glory in the local assemblies, and I believe the Lord would encourage us—for we all have to touch these things—by the thought that He has a special interest in us in relation to our local exercises, He carries us ever in His breastplate in relation to them.

What a comfort to know that the breastplate was never detached from the ephod. Christ as Priest before God bears all the local assemblies on His heart in relation to those particular features of His glory which local exercises are designed to bring out. All have their place in the universal setting, and go to make up the completeness of the administrative features which belong to the assemblies viewed universally. All are perfectly fitted together, like the stones in the breastplace, so as to be manifestly one complete whole; just as each tribe filled its own place in unity with the other eleven as encamping, or as moving in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. So that while each local assembly has its own exercise, all move together as one whole, and each forms an integral part of the whole. "The breastplate of judgment" would suggest that everything is to be judged from the standpoint of what is in the heart of Christ.

Divine judgment about everything is connected with the place the saints have in the affections of Christ. As to local exercises, there is something on the heart of Christ that He means to work out locally; now we want to get at what is on the heart of Christ—not merely what the brethren think or feel, but what particular phase of Christ's glory does He mean to bring out in us through the varied local exercises. If we committed ourselves to these things we should learn the love of Christ in a way we have never learnt it before. There is a speciality of nearness to Christ brought about through local assembly exercises that we cannot get in any other way. Then we begin to realise things from the standpoint of Christ's

glory; we are so apt to be governed by what is connected with ourselves; we often pursue, perhaps unconsciously, what stands connected with our own glory. But that is to perish; it belongs to what is Ishmaelitish; when we come to the exercises proper to the Israel of God we begin to think of Christ's glory. That glory is diversified; I believe that some feature of Christ's glory can come out locally at Crediton that is diverse from His glory as it comes out at Exmouth. It takes all the local assemblies to bring out this diversified glory of Christ; it comes out in detail in the local assemblies, worked out through their difficulties and exercises, and through the peculiar forms of pressure which they have to meet. Christ's glory is developed in the face of these things through His intercession. It is very encouraging. I believe the Lord would have us to be more definitely committed to the local assembly as "Christ's glory" than ever before. In the assemblies viewed according to God there is a setting forth of Christ's glory that corresponds with the precious stones in the breastplate. One local assembly is never to be detached in our minds from all the others.

There is a danger, on the one hand, that we may be occupied with what is universal without any exercise as to working things out locally, but, on the other hand, when we get the thought of what is local, we are apt to get too localised, and to lose the sense that we have to encamp and move with all the other tribes. But the square breastplate indicates universality; the Lord in Revelation 2 says, "all the assemblies shall know"; He has "all the assemblies" in view; all were set together round the tabernacle and in the breastplate.

Paul, in writing to the assembly of God in Corinth, is careful to remind them of the universal unity, for he addresses them as linked "*with all that in every place* call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. 1: 2. And he says, "The cup of blessing which we bless . . . The bread which we break . . . we, being many, are one loaf,

one body; for we all partake of that one loaf," 1 Cor. 10: 16, 17. The 'we' here is evidently the universal 'we'; the communion, or fellowship, is universal; all who partake of the one loaf "are one loaf, one body." This absolutely rules out the idea of independent assemblies. And he says further, "For also in the power of one Spirit *we* have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free, and have all been given to drink of one Spirit," 1 Cor. 12: 13. This is clearly universal; the saints in Corinth were "Christ's body", 1 Cor. 12: 27, and therefore they could not be regarded as independent of saints in other places who were also "Christ's body." This is not a voluntary association, or a *union* of independent assemblies, but an organic *unity* which, like the settings of gold which enclosed the stones of the breastplate, embraces all saints, in however many local assemblies they may be found. One could not, in the light of this, think that independent assemblies are of God any more than one could think that it was God's mind that the twelve tribes in Israel should be independent units. The saints are one body, and are called by God to one holy fellowship. So that the thought of independent local fellowship, or of any assembly action which can be limited in its bearing to the particular locality where it was taken, is entirely out of accord with the truth. No doubt "the assembly" in 1 Corinthians is generally the local assembly, but the assembly in its universal unity is also fully recognised; see chap. 10: 32; 12: 28; 15: 9.

Ques. Why was Levi not in the breastplate?

C.A.C. The tribe of Levi was not numbered for military service; their place was the charge and service of the tabernacle, and to carry it as the tabernacle of testimony through the wilderness; they are not included in the particular type which we are considering. Some of us think, perhaps, that it would be very nice if we had nothing to do but to come together to sing and praise and listen to precious ministry, without difficulties or local exercises;

no complicated questions of right or wrong to solve! But it is the exercises connected with administration that are the making of local assemblies, for they come in in view of the divine system being worked out practically in a concrete form, and that involves conflict and difficulty and the solution of perplexing questions. But that is just what makes the breastplate so precious, because it is "the breastplate of judgment" and the Urim and Thummim are there. How good it is to consider that in our local difficulties there is an opportunity for enquiry. There is no hope of the local company that thinks it is competent to deal with its local exercises without enquiring of the Lord; such a company will soon be on the rocks; there is always necessity for enquiring. The wisest man does not know, of his own wisdom, how to act in cases of difficulty in the local assembly; it is very rarely that there is an exact precedent that we can safely follow. There must be a resorting to the Urim and Thummim, and to the breastplate of judgment, to the very heart of Christ; as we truly resort to Him, Christ's glory will be developed in a wonderful way in the local companies; it is worth going in for. There is a divine and spiritual administration, and nothing is of any value locally but that. Things are not to be settled by consent or agreement, but in the light of the breastplate; then things will be done according to God, and the administration of the world to come will be anticipated in the assembly. Whatever judgment is reached will be a divine judgment; the way it is reached will be on spiritual lines through the local company enquiring of the Urim and Thummim.

Those who get the gain of local exercises are the ones who carry locally "Christ's glory." Such may sometimes be a small remnant. In the addresses to the seven assemblies the Lord refers in a particular way to the overcomer. Things are reached in spiritual power by overcoming; the church position is secured by overcomers; those who are not overcomers may be outwardly with the testimony,

but they will never be an integral part of it. I believe the principles we have been considering, and the affectionate interest of the heart of Christ as set forth in the breastplate, are divine, and therefore indestructible and permanent. Let us flee from everything that is of an Ishmaelitish character and get into the true exercises of the Israel of God.

When the saints were exercised about the gentiles in Acts 15, how Christ's glory came out in Jerusalem! Perhaps everyone there was naturally prejudiced the other way, and would have brought the gentiles into legal bondage, but to impose a legal system on the gentiles would not have been "Christ's glory." When all arrived at a common judgment that the work of God among the gentiles should be left in spiritual liberty, then Christ's glory came out, that is how it should be in the assemblies; the fruit of every local exercise is that Christ's glory is seen in the saints locally and administratively. A care for poor and needy saints is part of the administration; 2 Cor. 8. If we have to care for the poor it should be done in such a way that Christ's glory appears in it.

I believe these Old Testament scriptures have been held in reserve by the Spirit of God for the last days; their import is now brought out by the Spirit to be light and encouragement for those who are in difficult times. Many precious treasures have been locked up in the Scriptures, like the epistles to the seven assemblies, which were never understood in their prophetic character until the time arrived when it was needful that they should be understood. Many things in Scripture have been held in reserve; the typical teaching of the Old Testament is among the reserve stores of divine wisdom and love kept to encourage us in our exercises today. In the sense of this may we seek to answer locally to what the tribes are as seen in the breastplate!

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

CHAPTER 1

The book of Joshua does not, like the book of Deuteronomy, open up to us the wealth and blessedness of the land of Canaan or describe the enjoyment by God's chosen people of their inheritance. It is essentially a military book. The first half of the book is occupied by the wars of Jehovah, and the people are spoken of as the army of Jehovah; the latter half describes the division and occupation of the land by the tribes of Israel as the result of the conflict. This has a present voice to us, for none of us can enter into our inheritance apart from conflict; we do not hold anything for which we have not engaged in battle.

Joshua now is the prominent figure, and he is looked at as subordinate to Moses; he is spoken of more than once as Moses' attendant. There is a remarkable statement as to the disciples in the opening verses of Luke; they are described as "eye-witnesses of and attendants on the Word." That qualified them to take up the Joshua character of things. Joshua represents the most important spiritual reality which we need to lay hold of in view of moving into the land. I do not think he represents Christ personally—Christ personally is at the right hand of God—but he represents the Spirit of Christ found in leadership amongst the people of God.

It is interesting that it should be said that Joshua as a young man remained in the tent of meeting; it seems to indicate his training. Joshua appears first in Exodus 17 in connection with the conflict with Amalek; he appears there in a military connection. He gets the victory over Amalek, who represents Satan working through the flesh in a violent way to resist the Spirit. The Spirit had just

been given typically in the water from the rock, and now we find the action of the power of evil to resist that, but there was spiritual power in Joshua that enabled him to overcome Amalek. There was a good general in the field. Joshua's first experience was to learn how to overcome the hostility that there is to the presence and action of the Spirit in the people of God. In Exodus 34 we find him as a young man not departing from the tent of meeting. The tent of meeting was pitched outside the camp; it was a very unpretentious thing. It was not yet the tabernacle, but an informal structure; nevertheless the presence of Jehovah was there, and Joshua would not leave the tent; he remained in the secret of God's pavilion. He is seen as at home in nearness to God. We see him in two characters—on the field of battle with the enemy, and then abiding in the place where Jehovah was; and he is Moses' attendant. He seems to represent that spirit which would mark the saints as having known the company of the Lord.

I think God would touch our hearts by suggesting to us that we have a Joshua, we have an element of spiritual leading, and it lies in the Spirit of Christ. God would encourage the Spirit of Christ in His people, so He says, "Be strong and very courageous," and the people say to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous." The Joshua element was very powerful in both Paul and Timothy. Paul encouraged that spirit in Timothy all through his epistles. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." That would bring in the Joshua element, so that there might be spiritual leading amongst the people of God, something that God could support. God commits Himself absolutely to Joshua.

The Spirit of Christ is intensely set on bringing the people of God into everything that the love of God has purposed for them. That is the element amongst God's people that God would encourage and strengthen. It is most encouraging to me to think that there is that on this

earth at the present moment to which God can unreservedly commit Himself—that is the Spirit of Christ in the saints. It is a wonderful thing to recognise that there is spiritual power adequate to cause us to inherit all that God has given us in the purpose of His love; that is the element we want to strengthen and encourage. It is said in verse 5, "None shall be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not leave thee neither will I forsake thee. Be strong and courageous, for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I have sworn to their fathers to give them." God will never leave nor forsake those who are formed by the Spirit of Christ. He could not. It is because the saints are viewed as partakers of the Spirit of Christ that this scripture is quoted in Hebrews 13, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." We must read the epistle to see the kind of people in view; it is those who are the companions of Christ. If I walk after the flesh it would be profane for me to think that I could have the abiding presence of God with me. It has often been said of this scripture that it occurs three times in the Old Testament. It is said to Jacob in Genesis 28; it is said here to Joshua; and it is said to Solomon. Paul applies it to the sanctified company, the holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling; God never leaves them or forsakes them. The Spirit of Christ gives strength and courage that prepares one to suffer, to be outwardly weak, to go to the wall, but it is a spirit that can overcome every obstacle in the way of taking possession of the inheritance. The apostle Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," Phil. 4: 13.

It is a great thing to recognise that the saints are identified with the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ is identified with them, and God commits Himself absolutely to support that Spirit. If I move in the Spirit of Christ, I have the unreserved support of the blessed God. Our comfort as saints is that we are moving in concert with

the Spirit of Christ, and God is with that element, as He says here, "Jehovah thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Whithersoever the Spirit of Christ leads, God is with that leading. It is a very great exercise for us that we should see what it is that God can strengthen and encourage. If we are moving on the line of the spiritual leading of Christ, there is a living divine support, a victory over every foe; nothing will be able to obstruct us from entering into the inheritance.

Two things come out here in connection with which Joshua is exhorted to be strong and courageous. The first is the coming into the land: "Be strong and courageous, for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I have sworn to their fathers to give them," verse 6. The second is, "Only be strong and very courageous, that thou mayest take heed to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded thee. Turn not from it to the right or to the left that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart from thy mouth; and thou shalt meditate on it day and night, that thou mayest take heed to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt have good success in thy ways, and then shalt thou prosper," verses 7, 8. There are two things: the bringing into the land, and the taking heed to the book that is written. Those are the two great actions of spiritual leadership in the saints. The Spirit of Christ would always lead into the purposes of God's love; and on the other hand the law would be preserved in all its integrity, and the book that was written. Spiritual leadership is wholly governed by the written word. The law is most important because it is an element of divine control, and the Spirit of Christ would always magnify that in our hearts - the spirit of control. The commandments of the Lord are always to govern us. They are explicit and authoritative; they are to govern us, and the land will not be enjoyed otherwise. It is a test now of spirituality that the things that are written are

acknowledged to be the commandment of the Lord, 1 Corinthians 14,—that is how we know a spiritual person. A spiritual person always recognises the commandment of the Lord, and the Spirit of Christ in the saints can never be out of correspondence with the commandment of the Lord. Joshua was never out of accord with Moses; one could not think of such a thing. The law is part of what God has made known; every scripture is inspired of God. There is a remarkable reference to a book here, and reference to what was written. There is something explicit about it. People say, I think this and that, and I believe this or that, but the point is what is written, not what I go with. The Spirit of Christ will always give heed to what is written. If a brother says he knows he has the mind of the Lord, he subjects himself to the enquiry of the saints as to whether it is in accord with the Scriptures.

We read in verse 2, "Now rise up, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people." The whole people are identified with Joshua, and Joshua with them. It is an element of spiritual leading which every saint is privileged to recognise and give place to; and we can only recognise that in another as we have the same kind of thing in our own spirits. There must be that in ourselves that is in harmony with any light that God gives. When God gives light there is often great opposition and resentment, which shows that there is not that practically in the saints that is in correspondence with it. We are tested by any spiritual leading that there is amongst the saints; but, if I am giving place to the Spirit of Christ, I shall greatly appreciate and respond to what is of the Spirit of Christ wherever it is found. If there is any measure of true separation, there is an element of spiritual leading; it might be in a brother or sister, and it is a great thing to have that element strengthened and encouraged.

This book opens by calling attention to two important things. It is said in verse 4, "From the wilderness and this Lebanon to the great river, the river Euphrates, the whole

land of the Hittites, to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border." That gives the whole scope of God's purposed blessing for His people on both sides of the Jordan. Paul tells the Corinthians that all things were theirs, and they were an unspiritual people too. "In everything ye are enriched in him"—he spreads it out before them, "That shall be your border," an unlimited expanse; and all those of whom the Spirit can witness that they are children of God can say, That is our border. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, so the whole expanse of it is ours. The border includes everything on the privilege side and on the responsible side—both sides of the Jordan—the whole expanse of divine blessing in Christ. All is ours. But there is something else beside that. In verse 3 we read, "Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread have I given to you"—that is another matter. This refers to personal exercise and movement. "The sole of your foot" means that your feet have moved. While everything belongs to us, we only have as much as we have taken possession of. It is wholesome for us to remember that. The question is, What have I put my foot on? We would all accept as true that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ; we are all thankful to hear Paul tell us that all things are ours, and we believe it; but there must be a movement with Joshua - "thou and all this people." If they had not moved with Joshua they would never have put their foot on a piece of the land. The question comes to each of us, How much have we put our foot on it?

Joshua and the people are all identified; and as they followed and moved with Joshua they overcame one enemy after another. Every fresh piece of land they possessed involved marching and fighting. They did not put their foot on the land in five minutes; they had to move with Joshua. Now the question is, How far have we moved under the precious leadership of the Spirit of Christ? How far have we moved into the inheritance so

that we are conscious that we have put our foot on a certain piece of ground? That is the idea. Every fresh tract of land, as they moved on, meant fresh fighting and fresh victory, but there was that among them in Joshua that was able to overcome every foe.

It is an interesting fact that they never did possess all the land, and we know as a matter of fact that Joshua did not give them rest. Hebrews 4 tells us that he did not. The thing is left open, as it is to-day; there is very much land to be possessed. We are left in the exercise and encouragement of that. We have not possessed very much land; we have not put our foot on a great deal.

Joshua does two things here. First, he tells them to prepare victuals, which shows that a starving people cannot go over. It is a people that can prepare themselves victuals. Some of us have not reached that yet; our spiritual food has to be prepared for us and put into our mouths with a spoon. The Corinthians were spoon-fed people; they did not know how to prepare themselves victuals; but after Paul's second epistle to them they knew how to do it. If there is to be movement there must be energy, and there cannot be energy without food. That is why there is so little energy to-day amongst the people of God; they are so badly nourished. The Lord has set those over the household to give them their portion of meat in due season. The apostles have done their duty well; they have provided us with meat in due season for every possible emergency. There is a food supply in the ministry of the apostles, and also a perpetual food supply in the ministry of the gifts. There has been a living ministry going on for nearly two thousand years; the people of God have been fed and nourished all that time. In the dark ages even, many beloved saints lived and died in the confession of the truth; in the dark ages there was a food supply which kept up energy and ability to do something. The food supply is very important. Often difficulties and local troubles come in because the food

supply is short: the remedy is a little more food.

Then there is the other side that he speaks of. The unspiritual people, the two and a half tribes who had stopped on the wrong side of Jordan, are spoken to about going over with their brethren. Joshua reminds them of the universal character of the conflict which is connected with the inheritance. It is a lesson for us. We may have rest locally, but the conflict is going on, and no one in Israel is to settle down as long as the conflicts of the inheritance are going on. It is a great help to feel that, though I may not be eminent spiritually, yet I am called to take part in the conflicts of the inheritance. I think that is what Paul is referring to when he says to the Corinthians, "Quit yourselves like men; be strong"—he was calling them out to military service. And he says to the saints at Philippi, who were a spiritual people compared to the Corinthians, "stand firm in one spirit, with one soul, labouring together in the same conflict with the faith of the glad tidings." Everybody is called to take part in the conflict; no section of the people of God is exempt from military service.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter is of great importance as coming at the commencement of this book. It would intimate to us that if we are to possess and enjoy the land we must have Rahab's faith and Rahab's works. This is a particularly interesting chapter to us because it shows how the Gentile comes into possession of the land. It is most remarkable, and must have struck every one of us, that we should have a chapter like this at the beginning of a book like this. Before we have any of the triumphs of Joshua and the army of Jehovah, we have a moral triumph which is greater than any of the military

triumphs. I suppose the greatest victory recorded in the book is the victory of divine grace in the soul of Rahab. All those who form the household of faith, viewed as in the land, belong typically to Rahab's house. Rahab's household is the household of faith.

I think we see here the marvellous working of God in the very place where the enemy is strongest, for I suppose Jericho would represent that, and it was in the strongest part of Jericho, for Rahab's house was on the wall. We see here one in the strongest part of the enemy's stronghold, and such a one as she was, a disreputable woman, for the New Testament reminds us each time she is mentioned that she was Rahab the harlot. How this magnifies the sovereign mercy that could act in such a place as Jericho, and in one of the worst women in Jericho, and so work in her that she becomes the mother in Israel of her day! It is interesting to see that the spies that Joshua sent did nothing else, as far as the record goes, but take knowledge of the work of God in Rahab—not the strength of the enemy, but the mighty power of God that could work in the strongest part of the enemy's territory and secure such a triumph for Himself.

We read in Hebrews 11 that Rahab received the spies with peace. It must have been an astonishment to those spies to find a person in Jericho to receive them with peace. The fact was that Jehovah had become her God; their God was her God unquestionably. I have no doubt she was beyond many in Israel, because she was the one person who had a divine outlook on the situation. When the spies came back to Joshua they reported Rahab's outlook on the situation. It is very remarkable that Rahab's faith seems to be connected with how she received the spies, and her works are connected with how she dismissed them. We have to learn these two lessons: we have to learn spiritually what it means if we are to estimate the present situation aright.

The spies represent the two-fold character of the

mission of the Spirit. The mission of the Spirit to-day has a two-fold character: He is here as a spy and He is here as a messenger. Hebrews 11 calls them spies, and James 2 calls them messengers. Now the Spirit of God has come in that two-fold character: He is a spy to seek out and expose all the power of evil in this world. "He will bring demonstration to the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe on me; of righteousness because I go away to my Father, and ye behold me no longer; of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged," John 16: 8—12. That is the Spirit in the spy character; He searches out and exposes all the condition of the world in its opposition to God, in its Jericho character. On the other hand He is a messenger; He brings messages of blessing to all those who fear God. So these two men were spies in relation to Jericho, but messengers in relation to Rahab, divine messengers of grace and blessing; and the Spirit has that character for all who fear God.

"They came into a harlot's house, named Rahab." They came to her as messengers, and as spies she received them in peace. Rahab was quite in accord with the judgment that God had passed on the people to whom she had belonged; she is in harmony with God and His people about it all, so she received the spies with peace. There was perfect harmony between Rahab's spirit and the spies. What a wonderful thing that God could bring that about in presence of all the power of Satan and the world! He could bring a soul into harmony with His Spirit's work as to all that is in the world; He can do that in the sovereignty of His mercy. There is a great deal involved in it. Typically she entered into the death and resurrection of Christ, she could speak of what God did at the Red Sea, and then of what the people did in the overthrow of Sihon and Og. She understood typically what God had done through the death and resurrection of Christ for His people as seen in the Red Sea. And she understood what

He was in the power of the Spirit in His people in overthrowing the flesh. She had an estimate of it all, and she says, "That people shall be my people; I will link myself with them; their God shall be my God; I no longer belong to Jericho or to Jericho's king; I belong to those people." She received the spies with peace. Rahab shows how God in His sovereign mercy can separate a soul from this present evil world viewed as the sphere of spiritual activities of evil. Jericho represents this world as a sphere of the activities of spiritual evil, all kinds of wrong thoughts and teachings which emanate from wicked spirits in the heavenlies. God can work in such a scene and dissociate a soul completely from it; He did that for Rahab so that she had no longer any thought of being a friend of the world.

It is very wonderful that James should put Abraham and Rahab together. He selects them purposely. There is, so to speak, a father and a mother. He brings them together: the great august vessel of promise, Abraham, in all his dignity as the great father; and then a poor harlot, Rahab. They are both the subjects of the same sovereign calling, and the same sovereign working. So Abraham and the harlot stand both together, different vessels, but the same working and the same treasure put in each one. I may be a very respectable man like Abraham, as far as this world goes, or a most disreputable person like Rahab—that is only the vessel. What matters is what God puts into the vessel, and that is faith. God puts faith there; God put it into Abraham and He put it into Rahab. It is faith that distinguishes a person with God; not the vessel, but what God puts into the vessel.

The work of God in that woman's soul had completely detached her before the messengers came. Jehovah was her God and Jehovah's people her people, so that when the spies came she received them with peace. She was in harmony with what was outside the city, and in complete separation morally from what was inside the city. That is

the position for us to-day. As a matter of fact we are still in Jericho, but we are there as completely dissociated from everything morally of Jericho; and our interests and hopes are all connected with what is outside the city. I wonder if we have reached that point? If not, it is not much use reading the rest of the book. This chapter is the gate into Joshua, and if we have not Rahab's faith and Rahab's works we might as well shut the book. It is just as important for us to be justified by works as by faith; one is just as important a truth of Scripture as the other. Faith is nothing if it does not result in a changed outlook; you must have not only a door but a window. Rahab had a door, that is faith; but she had a window, that was her outlook; her faith was connected with her door, but her works were connected with her window. We must all have a door, there is no blessing without a door. Rahab received the spies, that was her door; but James tells us that she put forth the messengers another way, that is the window. She put them out of the window. A window is the outlook. The fact was that Rahab's door was on the city side. We find later on that the door was to be opened to let anybody in who liked to enter, but there was to be no going out of the door; if any one went out of the door his blood was on his own head.

It is wonderful to pass through the door of Rahab's house; that represents the household of faith in Jericho, and once through that door there is no going back to the city. All your hopes and aspirations after that become connected with the window; that looks outside the city. Some of us have a window on the wrong side of the house. This incident is one of the most striking connected with the household principle. It is not here a head of the house; she has a father and mother and brethren and sisters, and she claims them all for the blessing of God; it is very fine. Her faith was a household faith, which not only judged Jericho for herself, but she must have everyone connected with her in the same judgment.

It was salvation to come in, and faith is like the door. "By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with the unbelieving, having received the spies in peace"—that is connected with her door. To separate oneself, to have a door between you and Jericho, is a fine thing. It is a door that only opens one way; it opened to let in her father and mother, brethren and sisters. Everybody who had any kinship with Rahab could come in, and no one but those who had kinship with Rahab could come in. Am I one of Rahab's kinsfolk? Have I the same kind of faith as Rahab, that will judge the world in its strongest and most impious form, separate from it and identify myself with God and His people and all God is going to do for the honour of His Son? That is Rahab's faith. It is fine to see that she claims the blessing for her kindred; we are told that they all came in and identified themselves with her faith.

Lot did not save his house; he escaped himself but so as by fire. Alas! many are like that, Christian parents who secure the blessing for themselves and leave their children outside. It is terrible to think of a Christian parent being content to know he is going to heaven and not to be concerned whether his children are going to hell. It is awful, to put it plainly. Yet how many Christian parents there are who take no care that their children should walk in the same path as themselves; they neglect the spiritual welfare of their children. One has known parents full of thought and desire and energy to look after the physical and worldly benefit of their children, who perhaps never read the word with them or pray with them, never take them aside and pray with them or speak to them of the Lord. What can they expect? Rahab's care was not only for herself but that every one connected with her should look at things as she did. How could any of us rest if we had relatives who did not think of things as we do, and feel about things as we do? Should we not pray night and day, labour and do everything we could to bring them, so

to speak, inside the door?

Rahab is a fine example of the kind of spirit produced by the sovereign call of God, and by the working of God in the soul. Jehovah was her God. She said, "He is God in the heavens above and in the earth beneath." She had finished with the gods of Jericho, and all her hopes are connected with Jehovah and His people. She realises that God is kind and powerful, so she asks confidently for kindness. What a knowledge of God she had! She had been brought up all her life in the midst of gods who were intensely cruel, who were marked by the grossest forms of inhuman cruelty; but now she has a thought of a God who is kind and whose people are kind. What a revolution it would make in her soul! Her window now looks outside the city! Now our works are connected with our outlook—that is a fixed principle. What my outlook is determines the whole character of my spiritual life. What is my outlook? Rahab had not the slightest interest in anything in Jericho; her window looked outside the city in the direction of the people of God.

People think of making the world better; they have their window on the wrong side of the house. What is outside the city? The ark of the covenant, the people of God, Joshua and the priests. The ark of God is coming in to take possession of the land. Rahab looked out in that direction, so she put forth the messengers by another way. They came in at the door, but they went out by the window; she let them out of the window by a cord. Is not that suggestive? She linked herself personally with those two men by a cord. There was a very firm personal link between her and the two men; when she let them down by the cord it spoke of the fact that she linked herself in her affections definitely and firmly with the people of God. If Rahab had not been drawn with cords of love she would not have had any reason to link herself with the people of God and with the servants of God; she definitely linked herself with them when she let them down by a cord, and

the men never forgot it. They said, "Thou shalt bind in thy window this line of scarlet thread by which thou hast let us down."

Scarlet is a colour connected with the rights of Jehovah in Israel. Rahab acknowledged that all rights were there, and she put it in the window. It is her public confession that all the rights were not with the king of Jericho, but with Jehovah. He has the right to dispose of the land as He wills according to His good pleasure. She confesses it publicly; that is her outlook. She puts it in the window. At the present time our outlook is that in a very brief moment every other power is going to give way to the kingdom of our God and His Christ. That is our outlook and confession; not exactly to the world in this connection, but our confession is such as the people of God can take account of. There is an aspect of confession that the world can take account of, but there is another that the people of God can take account of. I do not think that Rahab puts up the scarlet line for the people of Jericho to see, but for the people of God to see. In Matthew they put a scarlet robe on Christ; in mockery they invested Him with the moral dignity of the Christ. Rahab in type confesses that; and whatever you confess you get the distinction of. She is not only saved, but Salmon marries her and Boaz is her son; she comes into the royal genealogy as the mother of God's anointed. In putting up the scarlet line she confesses before the people of God the royal rights of God. It is like God to bring in the Gentiles to possess the land, and to possess it as in the royal lineage. The history of Rahab is wonderful.

"She put them forth another way." It is a fine thing when we turn from the door to the window. If we are only thinking of our own blessing we are thinking about the door. How many thousands of God's people are thankful to have a door who have not considered the window. What is your outlook? Daniel had a window—his outlook was towards Jerusalem, though it was only a heap of ruins; it

was to him the city of the great King. Rahab's window opened towards the people of God as they were in God's mind; it opened to all the purposes of God. The spies learned from Rahab; they did not need to examine the fortifications or to count the enemy's soldiers. Rahab's faith was enough for them, and they went back to report the outlook of Rahab. There was not a word about the king or his chariots, or anything else, but they reported the situation as it appeared from Rahab's window. What they reported was on the spiritual side. The ten spies that Moses sent said the cities were walled up to heaven, but what does it matter if the wall is to heaven if God has taken possession of it? God took possession of the wall when He took possession of Rahab; her house was on the wall. If God has taken possession, what matter how high it is? When the walls came down flat, that piece stood, so the spies went in and brought all Rahab's household out.

Rahab's hiding the messengers is a secret from Jericho. We do not give away our secrets to the world. She came into the position of a traitor to her own people. We cannot be among the people of God without being traitors to what goes on in this present evil world. If I am a friend of the world I am an enemy of God, and if I want to be a friend of God I am a traitor to the world. You cannot imagine Rahab putting the spies out of the window and keeping up communication with the people inside the city. She was justified by works—she had transferred her allegiance from the king of Jericho to Jehovah, so she becomes a traitor to the king of Jericho and she hides the spies. She has her secrets and we have ours.

This chapter is a most important one morally, and especially for us Gentiles, because it sets forth in a striking way the calling and work and grace of God in a Gentile. The whole work of God is concentrated in Rahab.

CHAPTER 3

The people now move with Joshua, and they are called to lodge three days before they go over Jordan, which suggests a preparatory exercise in connection with important spiritual movements. I do not think God would have His people act, as it were, on the spur of the moment; He would have us consider what we are doing, especially in relation to spiritual movements, so that we do not act on sudden impulses. We act with consideration and conviction.

As we see in chapter 1, three days were allotted for the preparation of victuals. "Prepare yourselves victuals, for in three days ye shall pass over," it suggests that food is an important element in connection with that spiritual movement which is set forth in the crossing of the Jordan. It is a spiritually nourished people, not a starving people, that go over Jordan. Then the three days suggest the preparation of their hearts, the preparation of *our* hearts, to understand what the crossing of Jordan really means. The Lord spoke of three days: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," and He spoke of being three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. "Three days" is an important period. When the light of heaven shone into Paul's heart there were three days of preparatory exercise; there were three days in which he could not see and in which he did not eat or drink. There must have been deep exercises going on in his soul, but that was a necessary preparation for the new movement that he was about to make. I do not mean to say that in his case it was going over Jordan, but it was preparation for a great spiritual movement; he was about to move entirely out of the region of the flesh into the region of the Spirit. No doubt the deep exercise of the three days was needed in order that he might fully appreciate what he was going to move out of and what he was going to move

into. I think the three days were always present to the mind of the Lord. At the beginning of His ministry in John 2 He speaks of "after three days," showing that the thought of passing over to the resurrection side was much before Him at the very beginning of His ministry.

At the end of three days it is suggested that the people are prepared to fix their eyes on "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God." They are prepared to consider Christ personally, and to "remove from your place and go after it." This spiritual movement all depends on the place Christ secures in our hearts as the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, because it is a question of following Him—"go after it."

I think chapter 1 of the gospel of John is very suggestive in connection with this. The Lord Jesus is first seen as the Lamb of God, the Taker-away of the sin of the world—that is the sacrificial question which had to be settled first, and then comes the personal question. The second time John speaks he says, "Behold the Lamb of God"—it is the Person, and they follow Jesus; He is walking. It seems to me that the Spirit of God would suggest in that chapter that the Son of God is moving from what is sacrificial, what is connected with the dealing with sin, to the region of what is spiritual and eternal, so I think it directly answers to the crossing of the Jordan. He is moving over to the other side. The sacrificial side is on this side—that is finished—and He moves over and the disciples hear John speak and they go after Him. They follow the ark.

We have to take account of the fact that the people had had the ark in their midst and leading them for thirty-eight years. God's intention is to make Christ as the ark of the covenant very precious to us. That is what He has been about with us from the first moment when a ray of gospel light shone into our souls. We were thinking of our salvation, forgiveness and blessing, but what God was thinking about was connecting our affections with that

Person who brought salvation, forgiveness and blessing to us. He is the ark of the covenant; all is secured in Him and presented to us in Him so that we might learn to value and love that Person, and be deeply interested in His movements.

Then there is the wonderful presentation of Christ in the epistle to the Hebrews. It is to move us in our affections to the place where Christ is, to move us from earth to heaven. We may listen to ministry for long, but that does not set us in movement. We have often been reminded of that wonderful discourse in Luke 24 to which the two disciples listened, the most wonderful ministry that any one had ever heard. The whole of Scripture was opened to them by the Son of God, but it never turned their feet round. The ministry and exposition of Scripture did not move them, but when they had a sight of the Person, that moved them. He was leading them along a road which ended in the revelation of Himself in resurrection; He brought them to a point when they only needed one other touch: that their eyes might be opened and they might know Him. Many of us need that other touch. They saw the ark then. Nothing else will give us to understand what Jordan is but appreciation of Christ. We should ponder the gospels more; it would have a great effect on us if we pondered them in the only place they can be pondered, that is, in the holiest. There is no other place in which to read the gospels but in the holiest. If we want to read them spiritually according to the divine mind they must be contemplated in the holiest of all, because the gospels present the ark to us.

The different titles of the ark which we find in these two chapters answer to the gospels. In verse 11 of this chapter it is "*the ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth.*" No doubt that answers to the gospel of Matthew, where the nations are in view; it is the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth. We have the universal rights of Christ in Matthew. Then chapter 4: 15 reads, "And

Jehovah spoke to Joshua saying, Command the priests who bear *the ark of the testimony* that they come up out of Jordan." The ark of the testimony answers to Mark, where we see the testimony of God presented to man in His Servant-Son. Then chapter 3: 5 reads, "When ye see *the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God.*" I think that answers to Luke, where we see the marvellous presentation of the grace in which God can be known to man in His covenant. There is the full expression of the grace of God to man in Luke, which answers to the ark of the covenant. Then chapter 4: 11 reads, "When all the people had completely gone over, *the ark of Jehovah* went over." The ark of Jehovah answers to John's gospel. I think one would expect that there should be space made in the type for every aspect of the ark. Every aspect that Christ fills is presented in the four gospels, the complete presentation of all that is secured for God and man in Him as the ark. And, as I was saying, the proper place to contemplate it is the holiest; that is where we can see the ark of the covenant. We have an advantage over Israel. The types do not give the completeness of the divine thought; they are only shadows, not the image. The children of Israel in the wilderness never could enter the holiest. The difference between them and us is that all the time we are in the wilderness the privilege is open to each of us individually at any time to enter the holiest. What to do? To contemplate the ark. That was the only thing seen in the holiest—the ark and the mercy-seat (which was the cover of the ark). If we go in, there is nothing else to see but the ark. Inside the ark were the covenant and the testimony: that is, there is a perfect setting forth in the Person of Christ of all that God is in grace manward.

Luke presents the grace of God manward. Everything has been secured in a Man; God can present it to men as secured. If He says, "Thy sins be forgiven thee"—why did He say it? He would have been a blasphemer if it had not been secured. It is secured in the rights of His Person. So

with every blessing—man is not only set up in forgiveness, but in power, satisfaction, divine complacency and complete fitness for paradise. Christ is the ark of the covenant, and all is secured in His Person; so it all comes, not as demand, but as supply. It makes one love Him. You go into the holiest and contemplate Him and you love Him; and as you love Him you are prepared to follow Him wherever He moves. If He goes through Jordan you want to go too. Nobody will ever go through Jordan until their affections are indissolubly bound up with the ark of the covenant; no other power can take us through Jordan.

The immediate gain of the covenant in Hebrews is that it sets us free to enter the holiest. He tells us in the covenant, "Giving my laws into their hearts I will write them also in their understandings; and their sins and their lawlessnesses I will never remember any more . . . Having therefore brethren, boldness for entering into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus . . ." The first effect of the new covenant is that we approach in Christ; we have boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter the holiest. It does not say anything about coming out; the object of the Spirit is to move us to go in. The holiest is open to us individually; but, if we all assembled as having been in the holiest individually, what wonderful meetings we should have!

We do not want these things to be mere notions that we have gathered up from the Bible: we want to know the verity and reality of them. God has been working with many of us for many years, and all the time He has been imparting to our souls some sense of the preciousness of Christ as the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth. He has been showing us that all rights belong to Christ, the kingly rights and all rights of proprietorship. We have been learning slowly that every divine right is vested in Christ, and the kingdom of this world is soon to be His. We have learned too that Christ is the ark of the

testimony; everything that God has presented to men in witness He has presented in Christ—He is the complete testimony. Then the grace of God, the full measure of it, is set forth in Christ in Luke's gospel. It is perfectly wonderful—one could contemplate it for a thousand years and not see all the glory of it. Then John answers to the ark of Jehovah; it is God Himself in His own nature telling Himself out in His beloved Son. It is not now the rights of Christ, or the testimony, or the grace of God in Christ, but it is God Himself declared and made known in His beloved Son. As we contemplate that, our affections are bound up with Christ as the ark, so that, as He moves, and moves through Jordan, we are prepared to follow Him; there is no other way of going over.

We are not here occupied with our responsible history, our sins. The sacrificial side of the death of Christ deals with that. God has been glorified about all I have done, and all that I am; the man of offences has been removed in the death of Christ—that is the sacrificial side. But there is something further. It is a question of entering into an entirely new position and new state that never belonged to man, neither to man in innocence nor to man fallen. It is a new state and position which never had any existence until Christ rose from the dead. The death of Christ was necessary for that. No man could ever have entered that new state, so as to live in it for the pleasure of divine love, if Christ had not died. That is the aspect of the death of Christ set forth in the Jordan, and no one will ever learn death in Jordan character except from the gospels. I do not think that the epistles will in themselves ever teach us the Jordan aspect of the death of Christ; we must learn that from the gospels.

The wonderful thing is that it was in the days of harvest when the ark went into Jordan: that is, the full power of death was never known or could be known until the time came for God to give fruition to all the thoughts of His own love. God has in view the securing of the fruition of

all that is in His own purpose of love for man, but that is brought to light through the power of death as it was never known before. The power of death was never fully known until the Son of God went into death. The days of harvest and the Jordan overflowing all its banks go together. What a sense the disciples must have had when they realised after Pentecost, as they never did before, the power of death as they had learned it in Christ! What should we think if we walked in company with a Man who could speak the word and raise the dead! If we walked in company three and a half years with a Man who only had to touch the bier and speak the word and the dead were raised, what should we have thought if we had seen that Man go into death? Nothing in heaven or earth could give us such a sense of the power of death! That is Jordan overflowing all its banks. It gives us another thought of death altogether. Man dreads death. Why does he dread death? The reason for it is simply this, that every man realises, though he may not put it into words, that death is the end of the action of his own will. Death is the final termination of the action of creature will—that is why man dreads it.

When we come over Jordan we have another thought. That is, there is a region which faith can contemplate where there is nothing but the will of God, where there is all the delightful product of God's love, a region filled with the things which divine love has prepared for those that love God. What a blessed thing to contemplate! The way into that region is only through death. So death in the light of Christ's death is not simply the termination of creature will, but entry into all the blessedness of God's will for man. The ark goes that way. What a sense the people must have had of the power of the ark! It had accompanied them in their movements in the wilderness; they had been typically learning the blessedness of it; but now they come in view of the full power of death. Can the ark deal with that? They had to learn that the moment the

feet of the priests touched the water the whole presence of the power of death is removed. You will find if you look on the map that the waters stood in a heap twenty miles away; they did not see a drop of water. We have to realise what was there in His Person; we could not bear to contemplate the power of death if we did not realise the greatness of Christ.

I have often wondered why it was that, in all the questions the disciples asked the Lord when He was here, they never once asked Him about the power of death. It just shows that man who is not specially taught of God does not realise the power of death. You may depend on it that, if the disciples had realised it, they would have asked Him; but the thought in the disciples' minds was that He only had to take His rights and His place and reign in Zion gloriously. His title was all right, and He had power enough to do it, and had come from God to do it. What about Jordan? It never came into their thoughts. It is a solemn thing that the necessity for death comes very little into our thoughts. I believe we do not realise the solemnity of it. It would greatly intensify our affection for the Lord if we contemplated more the greatness of that power which was set forth in the Jordan overflowing all its banks. If we did so we should come to the Lord's supper with reverent and chastened spirits; there would be a tone about the morning meeting that would be indescribable. But we do not realise the greatness of the power that the Lord met, and our affections are often feeble and superficial.

The priests were the first to go in and the last to come out. They set forth the holiness in which the thoughts of God are carried out, the priestly character in which Christ entered into death. They are necessary in the type to present the glory of Christ in this character. The Spirit of God makes the ark very prominent, and also puts two thousand cubits between the ark and the people. Association of the people with the ark comes in after. The first

thought presented here is that there should be two thousand cubits distance between the ark and the people. It is Christ personally and the way He has gone in priestly holiness, and the distance between Him and the people is not to make Him obscure, but that there may be a clear view of Him. There was to be a certain space by which they saw the way so that they went over with a clearer view. If we consider John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1, we find the two thousand cubits between the ark and the people. We see Christ in His pre-eminence, in His solitary and unique grandeur, in His ability to meet all the power of death. We see all that glory in Him, and there is no question of the saints being in any way connected with that. It is His glory alone, but after that the people can go over.

CHAPTER 4

The Red Sea speaks of the death of Christ as the ground of separation from the world, and the ground of justification, so that as outside the life of Egypt we might know what it is to be justified and stand with God on the ground that Christ has died and been raised for us. But Jordan has in view our having a new place, and that new place is according to His place. There was no ark in the Red Sea, but at the Jordan. The complete power of death was met by the ark.

It is interesting to notice that at the end of the gospels it is not said that God raised Christ; we do not read at the end of any one of the gospels that *He was raised.* He died and *He is risen,* we read. It suggests the inherent power that was there in Himself. We have a similar thought in Hebrews 1: He "set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high." It is the inherent power of that Person. Within the compass of His Person He could make

purification of sins and "set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high." It is His own act, because it is His personal greatness that is brought out; He is great enough for that. It is not said here that God set Him there, though we have that lower down in the same chapter—God says, "Sit at my right hand"—but at the beginning of the chapter He sets Himself down. So in the end of the gospels it is said, "*He is risen.*" It suggests the power that there was in His Person. It is like what the Lord says in John 2, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," and in John 10, "I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again." It shows His complete power over death; we see death in its full force overflowing all its banks, but there was power in that Person great enough to cut it all off. He has cut off the full power of death. As God magnifies that Person before our hearts, there will be something set in movement in our souls that will lead us to follow Him: He has marked out the spiritual way for us to go. It is not His taking up need on our side, but He has taken up the thoughts of divine love, and He has been into death in order that every one of those thoughts might come into fruition.

In this chapter the twelve stones taken out of Jordan are the prominent subject. There was to be a perpetual memorial. The stones represented all Israel; there were twelve stones, taken up by twelve men, a man out of each tribe, and, though the twelve stones had been handled by twelve men, yet it said in verse 8, "And the children of Israel did so, as Joshua had commanded"—showing that it was done representatively. The first reference to these stones is connected with Christ personally. "When your children ask hereafter, What mean you by these stones? then ye shall say to them, that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; when it went through the Jordan the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial

unto the children of Israel for ever," verses 6, 7. That is, it has reference to what has been effected by the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; the waters of Jordan were cut off before it.

This type is of supreme importance. It pleased God that there should be a memorial set up here in the witness of the twelve apostles to the death and resurrection of Christ. There is the abiding witness of the apostles to the death and resurrection of that Person with whom they were so well acquainted. It was the Man with whom they were personally acquainted; they had companied with the ark and learned the value of the ark. They had seen how He could act in every circumstance of human need and weakness. They had followed the ark and had been in His company, not only in the days of His flesh, but in the days of His resurrection until the day He was taken up. They had eaten and drunk with Him in resurrection: they could give a powerful witness to His resurrection. He has completely annulled the whole power of death in its overflowing force; He has met it all and cut it all off. The waters of Jordan have been cut off—that is the basis of Christianity.

What comes out in this chapter is the typical instruction of these stones; the people are not exactly a type now, but the stones are. God sets forth the truth of the position in these stones; they are set up in permanent form for the instruction of all Israel, and we are the children so to speak, the persons who have to ask the questions and learn the instructions of the stones. We are not like the first generation who knew all about them. The apostles knew all about them, they are like the fathers; but we come along as the children and have to ask questions and get answers and learn what the stones mean. "What mean these stones?" Things have been set up in a permanent form in the witness of the apostles to Christ; it is a complete change in the apprehension of everything. I feel for myself how little one apprehends the extraordinary

change produced by the death and resurrection of Christ! What a change in the thoughts and outlook of the disciples! They had followed Him in the days of His flesh; they had heard His words and seen His works; and they had some kind of idea of the blessedness that was there. Then they had seen Him go into death, and now they find Him in resurrection in a new condition for man altogether, and in an entirely new place. Consider the witness of it! The witness of a Man in a new condition outside the life of flesh and blood, outside life in this world altogether. They are the witnesses of the Christ of God, of the ark in its victory over all the power of death as seen in the Jordan. There is a testimony set up which has its bearing towards all Israel, and towards the whole people of God, and it should affect the people of God profoundly. I do not think that God ever intended that the children of Israel should understand these things; it is written for our learning, that we might understand.

Gilgal was the base of operations. If there is to be any campaign the first thing is to establish a base of operations, where you lodge, where you move out from, and which you return to. This is a military book, we are in a military atmosphere, and Gilgal is the base of operations. The first characteristic of Gilgal is that the twelve stones are set up there; it is the testimony to the victorious power of Christ over death.

Joshua first says in chapter 3: 12, "Take you twelve men," and then in chapter 4: 4, he calls them. I think it shows the sovereignty of the call into the place of witness. The place the Lord has given to the witness of the apostles is wonderful. He says that the Comforter should be a witness. We can understand that, but right alongside the witness of the Comforter, a divine Person, He says, "And *ye too* bear witness, because ye are with me from the beginning," John 15: 27. He puts them in the place of witness alongside the Holy Spirit. That is the fruit of the sovereign call of God. So Peter says in Acts 10, "God . . .

showed him openly . . . unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." What a distinguished place the apostles had in their witness: they could say, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," Acts 15: 28. They were men who could put themselves alongside the Holy Spirit. There is the twofold character of witness; the witness of the Holy Spirit and the witness of men.

We learn to love the Lord through the testimony that has been brought to us by men who walked in company with Him. We have the testimony of men who walked with Him, men with whom He came in and went out. If we are influenced by the testimony of the apostles our affections will be bound up with that Person and we should be prepared to follow Him through death to resurrection. If we have gone as far as that with the twelve we are ready for Paul's ministry. It is not that there is any conflict between the testimony of the twelve and the testimony of Paul, but Paul adds to it. When Joshua sets up the stones he does not refer at all to the ark of the covenant, but he says, "on dry land did Israel come over this Jordan," verse 22. It is "because Jehovah your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you until ye had passed over," verse 23. It is not here how the ark cut off the power of death—that was more a direct reference to Christ personally—but Joshua calls attention to the fact that all the people had passed over. I think that corresponds to the Spirit of Christ in Paul.

Paul laboured very much. In writing to the Colossians he was setting up the stones in Gilgal. It is the testimony that all the people had gone over. In writing to the Colossians he tells them of his intensity of labour: "combating according to his working, which works in me in power," Col. 1: 29. There was divine power working in Paul towards the saints. He says, "I would have you know what combat I have for you," and he speaks of the things he agonised for, and the danger of their being diverted

from them. He goes on to speak of their being buried with Christ in baptism and their being raised with Him, "through faith of the working of God who raised him from among the dead," Col. 2: 12. Paul was bringing them to see that all the people were to go over as well as Christ. If I accept the testimony of the apostles that Christ has gone over into resurrection, that will prepare me in my affections to understand that all the people must go over. The whole of the Israel of God must go over, not only a part of Israel. What a rebuke it must have been for the two-and-a-half tribes when they saw the twelve stones set up at Gilgal; not nine-and-a-half stones set up, but twelve stones. It is the mind of God that every one of His people should be risen with Christ, and faith does not take any other estimate of the people.

The act of the twelve men represents typically the witness which God set up in men to the death and resurrection of Christ—that is the witness of the twelve. Then the action of Joshua in setting up the stones answers to the ministry of Paul, teaching the saints that according to the mind of God they are risen with Christ. But when we see Joshua putting twelve stones into the bed of Jordan—there was no command for it—it is an action which is supposed to take place in the souls of the people of God as led by the Spirit of Christ; they are led to take the place of having died with Christ. We are never told in any single passage of Scripture that we are to be dead with Christ. We are told, "If ye have died with Christ," that certain things must follow, but we are never told we are to be dead with Christ. We have to be spiritually prepared to be dead with Christ. Am I prepared to be led by the Spirit of Christ and to put stones into the bed of Jordan? They are to be there to this day—any day when we like to read it. It is an action of spiritual affection; as led by the Spirit of Christ the saints are prepared to take up the ground of being dead with Christ. We are never told to do it; it is an intuitive action of spontaneous affection. If the saints

were all regulated by the truth of being risen with Christ, it would have a marvellous effect on every one in this world. The fact is that Satan has taken away the stones so far as he can, and the memorial has not had its proper effect on the people of God. We have to see to it that it has its proper effect on us—complete separation from the world in every aspect. We want the affection that goes in for it.

CHAPTER 5

The kings of the Amorites would no doubt represent those powers that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 6; he describes them as great dignitaries: "Our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies." This first verse tells us that, when they "heard that Jehovah had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until they had passed over, that their heart melted, and there was no spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel." Rahab could speak of all He had done at the Red Sea—typically what God had done in the death and resurrection of Christ for His people. And she could speak of Sihon and Og, representing the victory over the flesh gained in the power of the Spirit in the saints. Now we have something further: there is a power operating to place the people of God in figure on the other side of death altogether.

Even on the shore of the Red Sea the children of Israel could sing of complete redemption. When they spoke of the inhabitants of Canaan, they spoke in a past tense: "All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away," Exod. 15: 15. The language of faith is according to the language of God; God calls things that be not as though

they were, and faith does the same. If God takes a thing in hand in the Man of His right hand, whom He has made strong for Himself, it is all absolutely assured from the outset, and we shall not need to wait for it to be actually accomplished.

The greatest power that the devil has is the might of death; and, if that is annulled, and annulled in such a way that the people of God can pass over to the other side, and actually live as risen with Christ beyond death, that is the sure pledge that every power of evil will be overthrown. These powers know it too; they know that they are about to be overthrown. How wonderful is the mighty power of God in raising Christ, and in raising His people with Christ! That is the great exhibition of divine power. "Jehovah will do wonders among you." "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you." It is the greatest operation of divine power. If we look at Christ, there is no question at all but that death has been annulled. You may say, Death is not annulled, for people are dying every day, but if we look at Christ we see that death is absolutely annulled. It expended its power, it overflowed all its banks against Christ, and there was not a drop of water left. He is a risen Man and death is annulled; it will never touch Him any more.

He has "annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings," 2 Tim. 1: 10. Paul was speaking of Christ; it is the glad tidings and they tell about Christ, about a Person who has been in death and annulled all its power, so that I might have part in all His victory. It is not only that He died for us; that is the Red Sea. But in Jordan He has gone into death and annulled its power so that we might be with Him, dead with Him and risen with Him. It is in view of association with Christ, and all the powers of evil can do nothing; they are powerless against a people risen with Christ, and they know it. The only hope they have is that some element of failure may be introduced among the people of God to rob

them of their power, and that is what they are working for. They could not touch us as risen with Christ; they are powerless, so they try to introduce some element of failure to take away our true power and leave us exposed to their attacks. If we stand on the ground where God has put us, and where faith has put us, there is not a power of evil but would melt away. It is wonderful to have such a Person who is absolutely victorious.

He is the Captain of Jehovah's army; He comes with a drawn sword in warlike character to be Captain of Jehovah's army. But He must have a suitable army, so this chapter is like the drilling of the army. The first thing is that they all have to be circumcised. It is the preparation of the people of God as being now on heavenly ground. This chapter is like the training for the conflict. Circumcision has a very important place. I suppose here it is circumcision in the Colossian aspect. The man that the enemy can handle has to be got rid of, not only in his bad features but in his good features; that is, what appear to be good features.

Paul speaks of this to the Philippians: "We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in flesh," Phil. 3: 3. He goes on to tell us his good points. "If any have cause to trust in the flesh I more—circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee"—it was all what a good man he was. But Paul was a truly circumcised man.

It is striking that Jehovah says, "Circumcise *again* the children of Israel the *second* time." He calls attention to the fact that it had not been done as it ought to have been done the first time. Circumcision should come properly early in Christian life; that is the normal aspect, but if neglected early it has to be done a second time, abnormally if not normally. We often have to do things again. Paul says to the Galatians, "My children, of whom I travail in

birth *again*." It is a serious thing when anything of God has to be done again. It is striking that they had not done it, and God does not seem to have raised the question in the wilderness; it suggests that in the wilderness it was not an urgent question. It shows how far we may go, and how much evidence we may have of God's delivering power, His salvation, His gracious care over us, and His giving us power to overcome our enemies. There may be a great deal and yet something vital neglected. Sometimes the goodness and favour of God makes His people careless. They had neglected circumcision all through the wilderness, and it was vital because it was a sign of the covenant. They had no title to consider themselves the people of God apart from circumcision. When it comes to be a question of the land and of overcoming the powers there, circumcision becomes of primary, vital importance.

The apostle addresses the Colossians: "See that there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the teaching of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and authority, in whom also ye have been circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Christ," Col. 2: 8—11. Circumcision there is from the standpoint of being complete or filled full in Christ. If we apprehended that we are filled full in Christ, we should not want the good man any more than the bad man. We should not want the philosopher, or the man of high moral standing, or the man of ordinances. We do not want him because he is not Christ, and we are filled full in Christ.

From the standpoint of being filled full in Christ we do not want a contribution from the man after the flesh; that is the first lesson in the land. The flesh must be cut off as a source of contribution. It is not only the bad flesh;

everyone can see how desirable it is to get rid of bad flesh. Everyone in the world could appreciate the abolition of drunkenness, the reform of the criminal classes, teaching men to have refined tastes and to follow refined pleasures. To create a high standard of moral conduct is the teaching of men, and we have to be delivered from it by circumcision. It is a sharp knife to cut off the man in the flesh in his best aspect. It is not the man who gratifies the lust of his flesh, the lawless man, the man who is dominated by what is evil, vile lusts, and self-gratification of a dreadful character—that is Romans—and any one can see that man will not do. But what about this absolutely perfect man to whom everyone looks up as a model of high moral standard, who is religious, who carries out obediently all God's ordinances—what about that man? The cross settles it all. It is astonishing how long we can go on and yet retain some value for the man after the flesh on the good side. That man must be cut off; otherwise there will be an element of the world about us, and an element of the world is the reproach of Egypt.

I do not think the reproach of Egypt means reproach before men, but it means what is reproach before God. It is a reproach on His people before God if there is a single element left that is of the world, "the teaching of men" or "the elements of the world." When people talk of the world, they think of theatres, picture palaces and all that kind of thing, but the world in Colossians is the religious world, the world of ordinances where you will be regulated to a nicety—what you do, what you touch, what you handle—that is the world. Any element of that kind is a reproach on God's people; God wants it rolled away, and He does it at Gilgal. If you see a person well brought up and that has everything that is nice about him, it is something to learn that it is all worthless. "Man at his best estate is vanity," because he is not Christ. If that man could be allowed, you would have man in the flesh occupying a place which only Christ can fill for the pleasure of

God. The saints are filled full in Christ—if we are, we do not want any other contribution.

When circumcision has taken place we should be able to hold the passover with quite a new apprehension of what is involved in it. The passover was the starting point, showing that God takes up His people from the very outset in the value of the death of Christ. It widens out before us as we go on; we get a deeper and a wider sense of the value of the death of Christ. We are not given any detail of this passover, only that they held it. We do not leave the passover in Egypt, nor yet in the wilderness, but it is carried on to the land. As we go on we have a fuller sense of the death of Christ as that which was before God from the very beginning. Peter dwells on the preciousness of the blood; it is a question of the value of redemption. "Knowing that ye have been redeemed, not by corruptible things, as silver or gold, from your vain conversation handed down from your fathers, but by precious blood as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world," 1 Pet. 1: 18. Peter carries them back to God's purpose. When God instituted the passover in Exodus 12, He told them that they should keep it in the land, showing that in the passover God had the land in view. He had a ground on which He could preserve His people from judgment, and carry them through the wilderness and put them in the land. The death of Christ in passover aspect has freed God to carry His purpose through to the finish.

The passover comes before they ate of the old corn of the land, and gives a sense of the cost at which God had taken His people to Himself. Paul emphasises it; he speaks of "the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own," Acts 20: 28. We have to think of what the passover was to God; it was "the blood of his own." It was God coming out to secure His people for Himself; it is all from His side, even in Exodus 12. The moral order here is very instructive: circumcision first,

then the passover, then unleavened bread and the old corn of the land. Unleavened bread is connected with the passover; it would be in relation to the scene of inflation and corruption. There is the perfect contrast to it in Christ. The old corn of the land views Him in relation to purpose.

The thought in "roasted" is that everything has been fully tested. It suggests that Christ as known in the condition of purpose—the fruit of the purpose of God, grown in the land and harvested in the land—is not to be separated in the heart from the thought of how fully He has been tested in every possible way. There has been the action of fire. The unleavened bread would preserve freedom from all that inflation which marks man. Keeping the feast of unleavened bread according to 1 Corinthians 5 is an elementary exercise; it is what the saints should be prepared to take up from the beginning. If we have something which has the character of meal, and elements are brought in which corrupt it and give it inflation and make room for the flesh, it is very dreadful in the sight of God.

The manna ceasing shows what an entirely new sphere of life is contemplated. The manna goes over Jordan; they had been living on it at the time they were circumcised, and at the time they kept the passover. The manna did not cease on the wilderness side of Jordan; it went over Jordan, which is striking, and shows that circumcision and the passover in the land are taken up in the power of the grace that comes down from heaven. Manna suits certain exercises up to a certain point, but then it ceases. When we come to what is connected with purpose, we are outside that sphere. We see the purpose of God which is outside all the wilderness needs; there are no needs there. The thoughts of God all come to fruition; all have been harvested in a risen and glorified Man. We are privileged to feed on that—the old corn—and apprehend God's purpose of love and His own delight in a Man in a new place and condition. The conflict of the land can only be taken up by those who eat the produce of the land—they ate the

produce of the land that year.

The thought of conflict is introduced with the man who appears with a drawn sword. Joshua is a soldier himself, so he does not entertain any thought of neutrality: "Art thou for us or for our enemies?" When we come to the conflicts of the land it is impossible to be neutral. Neutrality is a base expedient; and the Spirit of Christ as leading the saints would never entertain any thought of neutrality—it is one thing or another. When it is a question of the pleasure of God in regard to His people, and of the overthrow of all that is opposing, we cannot think of a neutral position. In principle everything is either favourable to the people of God, or it is hindering them.

"As captain of the army of Jehovah am I now come." It is the people viewed as Jehovah's army. It is to bring out the kind of spirit that is suitable for the conflict. Joshua had to take the sandals from off his feet. The place is holy, and spiritual conflict can only be taken up by those who have unshod feet. It is a lesson we need to take to heart. We shall never put our shoes on in that sense if we have not known first what it is to take them off according to this chapter. It is the effect in the soul of the apprehension of holiness—a great lesson to learn.

CHAPTER 6

How important it is that the walls of Jericho should really come down for us! It is of the deepest importance that we should have a spiritual estimate of things. If we do not judge the Jericho system it will dominate us; we need to see the real truth of the position.

Jericho stands on divine territory; it represents the power of the enemy in the spiritual sphere. Egypt represents the world system in connection with its resources, its wisdom, and its ability to manage its own

affairs. It has wonderful resources. We read about the wisdom of the Egyptians, men very wise in the conduct of their affairs, as the Lord says, "The children of this world are wiser than the children of light." Wisdom and resource in regard to the affairs of men are one thing, but to set up a power in what one might call divine territory is another thing. The powers in the land of Canaan are powers holding divine territory that belongs to God, and holding it in insubjection to God. The walls of Jericho are the defence of a system that exists to keep people from being in subjection to God. All through the history of the people of God there has been a power hostile to God and that power must come down; it is bound to come down. All the strength and the defence of it, its greatness and pride—it may be walled up to heaven—must come down. Here God means it to come down by faith; it will come down at the appearing of Christ. If it does not come down before, it certainly will then, but God's thought is that it should come down by faith. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, having been encircled for seven days," Heb. 11: 30. It is a question of faith; and what answers to this chapter is a certain triumph of faith to be effected in our souls at the present moment. The whole secret of the power lay in the people being identified with the ark and moving with the ark. All the power was the power of the ark; as far as the people were concerned they did not strike a blow. The priests in this chapter are of more importance than the soldiers. The ark is of all importance; neither priests nor soldiers would have been of any use without the ark, so they had this remarkable week of spiritual education.

In the Acts of the Apostles we see how every power that existed had to come down, and every power that held the Jericho system was shaking. Peter, John, James, Stephen, Philip, and Paul were all men of faith, and they were priests. They were good soldiers too, but it takes something more than a soldier to bring walls down; it needs a priest, and all those men were priests. The priest

is a consecrated man, a man wholly for God; the holy anointing is upon him. The thought of holinesss is suggested at the end of the previous chapter: if the Lord comes in as captain of Jehovah's army, what must characterise the people, looked upon as led by the Spirit of Christ, is holiness. There must be an entire absence of neutrality; Joshua had no thought of neutrality. "Art thou for us or for our enemies"—there is no neutral position. Then he takes his shoes off because the place is holy. There is uncompromising decision on the one hand, and personal holines of intense character on the other. A man in that spiritual condition is qualified to hear the voice of Jehovah. We cannot hear the voice of Jehovah merely by reading the Bible; many think they can get God's mind and direction by reading the Bible, but they will only get it by being spiritual. Of course the Scriptures are our great safeguard, but I am pressing that a man might read the Bible and never get a ray of spiritual light. Many an unconverted man spends his life reading the Bible and studying it. Many of these unconverted doctors of divinity know more about the Bible than we do; they know every verse of Scripture and have studied it in the original, but they have no light; they are as dark as midnight. There must be spiritual conditions. The Lord says repeatedly, "He that hath an ear let him hear"—there must be conditions in the hearer; there was condition in Joshua. The Spirit of God says through John, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies." If I think I can hear what the Spirit says without regard to my spiritual condition, I deceive myself. I must have an ear first; that is the spirit of obedience. The Scriptures will not do me any good without the spirit of obedience in my soul. The ear is the characteristic feature in a man's body. Man thinks about his hand, his feet and his brain, but what God delights in is his ear. The Lord came into this world saying, "Ears hast thou prepared me," Psa. 40: 6. The basis of what is spiritual is the spirit of obedience.

We need to be very much exercised about our state; that is largely the subject of Joshua 5. We have the army in training in Joshua 5, and the army in the field in Joshua 6. There are certain spiritual features that must have their place in the people of God as preparatory to going into action.

We see what the falling of the walls of Jericho means when we consider what went on in the soul of Paul. In the soul of Paul the walls of Jericho were down. There are seven priests with trumpets, they go on before the ark, and they are able to give a certain sound, a loud, clear, penetrating sound. Speaking typically, every note of the sounding out of those seven trumpets spoke of the glory and power of the ark. They went before the ark and sounded out the glory and power of the ark for all Israel to hear. I do not think it was for the people of Jericho to hear. There are two instances in the chapter, and in both cases it was for the people of God to hear. This is a question of battle—"If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for war?" 1 Cor. 14: 8. The trumpet has to do with war.

Here it is a question of the Jericho system being fully estimated. We have to go round it, and keep on going round it seven days, and then seven times in one day. They had to estimate the strength of every bulwark, tower and gate all round; every part of the city was taken account of, but they did it in relation to the ark; they went round it in company with the ark. I believe God would have us go round Jericho and take stock of the whole strength of the Jericho system; He would have us to estimate it all, but to estimate it from the standpoint of being in company with the ark, in company with the Person before whom it will all come down. All must come down before the ark—it is a spiritual education.

At the beginning there was a clear sounding of trumpets. Sounding the trumpets is a priestly work, not the work of soldiers. It says in Numbers 10, "The priests, the

sons of Aaron, shall blow with trumpets"; it is priestly work. They are consecrated men; they have the garments and the anointing on them. We are often content with what we have in us; we are conscious that we have the Spirit, but the fact that we have the Spirit in us is not our qualification for service. Qualification for service is the anointing; that is something poured on you. If you look on the priest on the day of his consecration you will see the oil on him. As a matter of fact it ran down to the skirts of his garments; everybody could see that he was an anointed man. The anointing is external; it is what people can take account of. They cannot take account of the Spirit in my heart, but they can of the anointing, that I am moving, and speaking, and serving in a holy power in which there is no admixture of anything of mine. Can people take account of our service like that? The Lord could say in Luke 4, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me." If we read Luke and look at the Lord externally, we shall see the grace of His movements and of His words; even those who did not know Him had to marvel at His gracious words. Why? Because He was in the power of the anointing. "God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went through all quarters doing good, and healing all that were under the power of the devil, because God was with him," Acts 10: 38. There was the grace of the anointing. A priest typically is a consecrated and anointed man, and what you see externally is the evidence that there is a power and grace there that is not of man. Stephen's very countenance was luminous with celestial light, really the light of the anointing. At the end of Luke the Lord speaks to the disciples and says, "Remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high." He does not say, Stay there until you are given the Spirit to be in your heart—that is internal—but He says, "till ye be clothed"—it is external. The internal is important, but the internal alone will not qualify for service.

There is a sounding out here, God provides seven priests and seven trumpets. There is a perfect sounding-out in a clear and definite way of the power of Christ as the ark, before which all the strength and defences and glory of the Jericho system must come down. God would march His people round the city until they had faith; it took seven days to bring the people to the faith of what God was about to do. God did not bring the walls down by the action of His own power; He waited until there was the power of faith in His people to bring them down. God could have brought the walls down the first day, the moment there was the sounding of the first trumpet; but that was not God's object. His object was to educate the people into this by bringing their souls into the faith of it. So He says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." It was not alone by the power of God or by the ark, but by faith. God has great pleasure in faith, because faith always says, "Glory all belongs to God," and faith makes everything of the ark.

Jericho is an imposing city, and we are all naturally influenced by the imposing character of it. Jericho represents the mind of man at work in the sphere of spiritual things. It is a great thing to keep where the Spirit of God can sound out through spiritual men, through priests, the glory and the power of the ark. If we are in company with those seven priests we can go round Jericho day after day; and on the seventh day we can go round seven times, and survey everything that is great and pretentious in the mind of man, and we can look at it all in the light of the power and authority of the ark. It is all coming down.

The ark here sets forth the power of Christ entirely to set aside every working of the natural mind, even in relation to spiritual things. There is one aspect of things connected with fleshly lusts—all those things which work on the line of self-indulgence or self-exaltation in connection with natural things. That is like Sihon and Og,

self-indulgence and self-display. We have to get the victory over them on the east side of Jordan. But when we come into the land we find the exaltation of man in connection with the moral and religious sphere, and Christendom is full of it. In Acts we see the walls all down; we see what answers to Joshua, the priests, and the trumpets going round the city, and the effect is that every power that influenced men morally is brought down. But it was not very long before Jericho began to be rebuilt, and there cannot be any result for God in the building up of Jericho; so this man who built the city hundreds of years after left no posterity for God. He laid the foundations in his first-born—he lost his first-born, and he set up the gates in his youngest—he lost his youngest when he finshed it. He cut off his own posterity for God; that is the effect of building up Jericho. Everyone who does it cuts off his own posterity; there is no abiding result, no fruit for God, there is only the setting up again of that which is accursed.

We see how the mind of man is glorified to-day. One of the most magnificent buildings in England carries the inscription, "There is nothing great on earth but man." If you go round to the other side you read, "There is nothing great in man but mind." That is the walls of Jericho. Have they come down for us, so that man and his mind is utterly discounted? Nothing is of value, nothing has glory or power in our estimation but the ark of the covenant, nothing but Christ. Before Christ all is seen to be contemptible and offensive that belongs to man; it is utterly judged in the cross of Christ—the walls have all come down. Am I impressed with the great mental ability of man, by the wonderful knowledge he has, even of Scripture? All that has to come down; there is to be nothing but Christ.

It is important to see that there was that in Jericho which belonged to God. The silver, gold and copper all belonged to God, but they had been incorporated in the Jericho system, and had to be rescued from the system in

which the devil had incorporated them: they had to be restored to their proper place in the treasury of the house of Jehovah. There are things in the Jericho system that belong to God; every right conception that man has is of God, but they have the conception connected with the wrong man. Every conception that has moral or spiritual value is of God wherever we find it. We find men preaching wonderful moral conceptions, and perhaps even spiritual thoughts—all these things belong to God, but in the Jericho system all is linked on with the wrong man, and utilised to give distinction and glory, and honour to the wrong man, not to Christ. Now God is going to rescue every thought that has divine value from the Jericho system. God is going to bring down that system, but He does not forget that there is gold, silver and copper that has divine value, and He is going to rescue all that and put it in His treasury. It is blessed to know that all these thoughts that in Christendom are connected with the man after the flesh are going to be rescued by the power of God and connected with Christ. When the walls come down and the city is devoted to destruction, all these elements that are of God are rescued and put into the treasury of God.

Rahab is a beautiful expression of what one would call the moral victory of God. He could go to Jericho and secure a household for Himself; He could separate a woman and her household altogether from the system which He was going to overthrow; and He could give her a door which spoke of faith and a window which spoke of works. The greatest victory that divine power wrought in Canaan was not over the seven nations but over Rahab's heart; that is why she is put in the forefront of this book. God places her, a Gentile woman of base character morally, in the inheritance in the genealogy of Christ, and makes her the most distinguished mother in Israel. It shows the magnificence of the sovereignty of mercy. We cannot mix the types, but we see in Rahab the wonderful

character of divine victory; she is not content to be blessed herself, but she would have every member of her household blessed, so God secures a household of faith in the strongest part of Jericho, on the wall of the city. In the very stronghold of the enemy's power God secures His own witness of what He is doing to-day. The walls of Jericho have not actually come down yet, but they will come down, and when they do God will take the household of faith clean out of Jericho.

CHAPTER 7

We have been looking a little at the irresistible power of the ark in relation to Jordan, and in relation to the walls of Jericho—a power so great that nothing can stand before it. I suppose the enemy very soon realised that his only chance was to corrupt the people of God in order that the power of the ark might not be practically available. We can see the power of the enemy at Ephesus; the walls of Jericho had fallen at Ephesus with a tremendous crash, but the enemy went to work in a subtle way to displace the ark in the affections of the people of God, so the Lord had to say that they had left their first love. If the ark lost its place in the affections of the people of God, as happened with Achan, the end must be the extinction of the light.

We have considered the spiritual education that the people had for seven days going round Jericho in company with the ark, and listening all the time to the priestly trumpets sounding continually. They were to learn by this to take account of all the world power, but to take account of it in relation to Christ—the ark—so that at the end of the week they could shout. When we have had a spiritual education, we have to pass our examination at the end of the term. That is a fixed principle with God;

there is always a test. If there is a special ministry of Christ among the people of God, He will send a test. God will give seven days of education, a full term, and perhaps His people will learn to shout; but sometimes we shout before we have reached in our hearts what we are shouting about. Achan perhaps was shouting, but he had not in his heart what he was shouting about. If he shouted it was in response to the priestly trumpets, and they no doubt announced the glory and power of the ark. It is one thing to shout in response to the priestly trumpets—to appreciate current ministry and shout in response—but it is another thing to have the power of it in one's soul. The test comes, the examination day comes, to see whether we have learned our lesson, whether we have it in our heart. If there has been a precious ministry of Christ in priestly holiness and power, and the people of God have been educated to the point of shouting in response to an enemy fallen publicly, we may depend on it the enemy will suddenly change his tactics and make another move, a more subtle move, because it is a move in the affections of the people of God, a corrupting move in their affections. Achan's sin brought to light that he was not in his own spirit governed by the ark. He had been following it, perhaps shouting with it, but in his own affections he was not governed by the ark.

Ananias and Sapphira are the Achans of the New Testament; when the examination day came they had not learnt their lesson. They wanted to clothe themselves with the ornament of great devotedness to Christ. They wanted to have the credit amongst a people of God of a devotedness which was not in their hearts—that is a Babylonish garment. One could not be on that line if one was governed by the ark. If we see the wonderful place that Christ has as the ark, we should be in harmony with the Spirit of Christ as expressed in Joshua. Joshua had said that all the silver and gold were to be held for Jehovah, and they were all to be put into the treasury of the house of

Jehovah. Now that was the mind of the Spirit of Christ, but Achan was quite out of tune; he took the silver and the gold and added it to himself. It was a gross act of unfaithfulness; it was robbing God.

He had not apprehended the stones in the bed of Jordan. A man who had seen his place in the bed of the river, and put himself there, would not want a goodly Babylonish garment—he would not want to connect a single divine thought with himself as a natural man. I suppose the silver and the gold represent what has value with God, though it may be incorporated with the Jericho system. There is an immense amount of silver and gold in the Jericho system to-day. Men have taken almost everything of God and used it to enrich and beautify the Jericho system; all the light of Christianity is taken to enrich the Jericho system. Here we see that principle of using things for the exaltation of the natural man, the man after the flesh, introduced into the heart of Achan. It is not Jericho with its towering walls in view objectively, but it is the Jericho system set up in the heart of an Israelite; and that is a worse kind of Jericho than the other. It is a very solemn thing to take up what is of God and use it on the Jericho principle. It is possible for us to take the truth of God and use it to glorify ourselves instead of seeing that everything that has divine value must go into the treasury of the house of Jehovah. Everything precious must be connected with Christ and must stand connected with the saints as Christ's body.

The mystery of God is the treasure now, because in it "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Col. 2: 3. Every piece of silver and gold, everything of value and excellence which God can attach worth to, had to go into the treasury; and, particularly in this type, all the things which men have stolen from God and appropriated, or misappropriated, and used for their own glory. In christendom divine truth is connected with the wrong man, and man has used it to magnify the importance of

that man who is under the curse of God. We have to see to it that we are not in some way setting up that man, or connecting things with that man, instead of connecting things with Christ, connecting ourselves and all the brethren with Christ. The sectarian principle brings in something that is not Christ.

The point here is the universality of the thing; it says, "The children of Israel committed unfaithfulness in that which had been brought under the curse . . . and the anger of Jehovah was kindled against the children of Israel." As we know later in the book, Joshua says, "Did not Achan the son of Zera commit a trespass in the accursed thing? and wrath fell on all the assembly of Israel, and he perished not alone in his iniquity," chap. 22: 20. It shows the peculiar bond which God recognises in His Israel, that what one man did actually involved all Israel. None of us are independent units. If the element of unfaithfulness is introduced, even if it only comes in in one man, under the eye of God it characterises the whole people until they judge it.

It would be good for us to consider how the assembly is involved in the action of one person. We may think that we can hide things in our own tents, and nobody will know anything about it. But what we have hidden in our tent, some thought or desire to have something connected with ourselves as living in the world, has an effect under the eye of God upon the whole assembly. It is a searching exercise. Things come to light in the assembly; if there is a principle of unfaithfulness, God will bring it to light. Any unfaithfulness in Israel must be judged; otherwise Israel would cease to be the Israel of God.

In verse 11 every detail done is attributed to Israel: "They put it among their own stuff." It shows us God's way of looking at things. We might have thought that if there was only one person unfaithful, it was his own affair. The Lord said at the Supper table, "One of you," and the exercise was taken up by them all; they all said,

"Is it I?" Each apostle took up personally the exercise, whether he was the betrayer or not. We need a deeper sense of the bond in which we are set as of the assembly. "Wrath came on the assembly"—it did at Corinth. There was a certain disorder connected with eating the Supper, and judgment came on the whole company: "On this account many among you are weak and infirm, and a good many are fallen asleep," 1 Cor. 11: 30. The Lord judged the whole company for the disorder on the part of perhaps a small proportion. It brings home to every true Israelite the necessity of unsparing judgment of unfaithfulness. No one is exempted; every Israelite had to put his own hand to the judgment of this unfaithfulness.

Even Joshua did not know about it until Jehovah told him. We need spirituality to judge things according to God. Sometimes we have to learn things through sharp discipline. That was the case here; there was no exercise in Israel until they found themselves unable to go on in their victorious way. They found the Lord's support withdrawn, and they were smitten and fell before their enemies. It must have been a terrible discipline to undergo in Canaan in view of the promises God had given them. It is a principle that, when elements of unfaithfulness have a place with us, we underrate the power of the enemy.

The people had to hallow themselves, verse 13. I suppose it was an exercise in regard to their moral state in view of divine testing. Jehovah was going to find out where the unfaithfulness was, and it called for much exercise. Every time the Lord calls His saints together in assembly, He calls on us to hallow ourselves as to what we have been allowing, what has governed our spirits and ways, and what we have in our tents. If Achan had hallowed the ark in his affections he would have rejoiced to put the silver and the gold into the treasury.

The people had not returned to Gilgal after their victory at Jericho, and that has an important bearing on the

matter. We have had some very blessed things before us in this book; and now this chapter comes to pull us up, and to give us searchings of heart whether we have understood what it means to go through Jordan, to be circumcised, to keep the passover, to eat the old corn of the land, and to go round Jericho with the ark. Have we got it in our souls, so that we are commanded in our affections by Christ?

Similar feelings to those expressed by Joshua in verses 7—9 often come up in the exercises of the people of God. There is a thought, If we had remained on lower ground we would have acquitted ourselves better. I suppose we all know what that kind of feeling is. But Joshua does not finish with that, he finishes with the thought of Jehovah's great name: "What wilt thou do for thy great name?" After all, whatever failure there might be, the possession of the land and victory over the enemies in the land were matters that touched the name of Jehovah. His honour and His glory stood connected with it. If we apprehended that the glory of God and the honour of Christ stand connected with the full measure of spiritual blessing according to His own purpose, we could not think of being content with anything short of that. It might be easier and we might do better on a lower ground, but faith never entertains such a proposition.

The valley of Achor will be "a door of hope", Hosea 2: 15, suggesting that the remnant will come back by that door in the confession of Israel's state, and in complete judgment of it. It becomes a place of pasturage according to Isaiah 65: 10. This shows how God uses every exercise that comes among His people, even though through their own unfaithfulness, and makes it contributory to His own thoughts.

All Israel judged the sin, for they all stoned Achan. That is a principle for us, for any element of unfaithfulness that comes among the people of God has to be judged by all His people. Whatever has to be judged

locally, a judgment is formed in view of all Israel and all Israel share in the judgment, so, discipline is exercised in any locality, the saints there act representatively for the whole assembly, and so as to carry all their brethren with them.

CHAPTER 8

In this chapter the elements of unfaithfulness have been judged. God cannot go on with His people while unfaithfulness is unjudged, but when the elements of unfaithfulness are judged God can resume His place with Israel and say, "Fear not, neither be dismayed." That is based on the unsparing judgment of unfaithfulness.

It is very striking that the ark never goes into battle again after Jericho. I think it gives the overthrow of Jericho a very important and distinctive place: that is, Jericho stands in opposition to Christ as the ark. We might say the battle there was between the ark and Jericho. The seven days were an educational period; the people had to go repeatedly round Jericho, and take account of its fortifications, the strength of the city and the height of it; and to take account of it in company with the ark, moving with the ark and listening all the time to the priestly trumpets. They went before the ark just as trumpeters go before the king or some great personage. The children of Israel listened to that for seven days, and at the end of that time they had faith enough to bring down the walls of Jericho. In that time they had so learned the power of Christ that all the strength of the world as opposed to Christ must come down.

At Ai, on the other hand, they sought to rely on their own strength. They had to learn their own weakness. The day of triumph had hardly passed before they exposed their own weakness, showing that, like the saints of

to-day, they had not learned their lesson. The first lesson in the land is Jericho; the second is Ai. These two cities are the only two where the detail is given, because they cover the whole conflict for the inheritance. After Ai, Joshua begins formally to take possession of the land, building an altar and setting up the law, pronouncing everything which Moses commanded. It is the formal assumption of the land. Every question was settled. If we learn the lessons of Jericho and Ai there will be no fear of us. In Jericho it is a question of the ark, a question of the introduction of the will of God in Christ. God has introduced Christ into this scene of lawlessness and insubjection, and He will cause every whit of lawlessness and insubjection to fall before the One who came into this world to do His will. That is the way He secures all His rights. The great lesson of Jericho is the securing the rights of Jehovah. Nothing at Jericho is secured for the people; everything is for Jehovah. When we come to Ai it is another question; it is a question of the portion of His people. Those are the two questions which cover everything. If all that is due to God is secured, and all that God has designed to bestow on His people is secured, we have everything covered. All the spoil of Jericho is for Jehovah, and all the spoil of Ai is for His people. The ark secured everything in the rights of God for the pleasure of God. Then the outstretched javelin is the Spirit of the Lord; the power at Ai is in the Spirit.

It is obvious that there are two great questions connected with Jericho and Ai. The first question is what is due to God. It is due to God that His will should prevail, and Christ came in as the ark with God's law written in His heart—"Lo, I come to do thy will." He brings God's will in, and when God's will comes in the creature will must fall—the two cannot go on. It is our privilege to see the Jericho system levelled with the ground now by the power of the ark. After Jericho it is not the ark; it is the people of God and the men of war. Now the question of spiritual

condition in the saints is raised.

If things are dependent on the spiritual state in the people of God, there is something that the enemy can work on, and he works by introducing elements of unfaithfulness. The first human element to be introduced in the book is in the spies saying, "Let not all the people go up; let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai," chap. 7: 3. How commendable it sounds to the brethren! The people had to learn to disallow that sectarian spirit which introduced a principle fatal to the constitution of Israel. However nice it might sound, it was a sectarian principle, a spirit independent of Israel, a sectional movement. The people had to learn to disallow that. No doubt we have all noticed how insistent the Spirit is over and over again in saying, "Joshua and all Israel with him." That is, the people had to learn to disallow what was sectional and independent; they had to learn that all Israel must move with Joshua. People might say, Do not let all the people toil there; it is only a little local trouble, only a small affair. But if it is conflict for the inheritance, it is the business of all Israel, and there is nothing local about it. Every conflict in relation to the inheritance is the business of all Israel: if God raises a question at any place which has reference to the inheritance in any shape or form, it is not a local question, it is a universal question; and all Israel must realise that they have to participate in the conflict. It affects the whole assembly, and the whole assembly will be, and is, identified with the fighting in that place.

We see here that, the moment the thing is transferred to the people, there is weakness. As long as it was the ark and the enemy, there was no question, but, the moment it ceases to be the ark and the enemy, it becomes the men of war and the enemy, and we have elements of weakness at once. It is like Paul's address to the Ephesian elders. In the first part we have the ark of the covenant. He speaks of his ministry, repentance towards God, faith in

our Lord Jesus, the gospel of the grace of God, and the whole counsel of God. That is all on the divine side and there is no element of weakness there; all is introduced in divine power in connection with the ark. But then Paul says, "after my departure"—that is another story. Now it is a question of the condition of those who will be left as men of war.

The base of operations was Gilgal, and there had been no return to or going up from there. If they had gone back to Gilgal, speaking typically, they would not have introduced any element of human expediency; they would not have said that two or three thousand was enough.

The stratagem in chapter 8, however, was not a matter of human expediency; it was God's suggestion. Jehovah Himself said, "Lay an ambush." They had become free now and had learnt to judge human elements; they disallowed the principle on which they had acted before, and they are in obedience here to the word of Jehovah. God Himself is the One who plans the campaign; they have only to carry out the plan of campaign as given to them by Jehovah. Human expediency and unfaithfulness, and what is sectional which loses sight of all Israel, are dreadful to God. They went into conflict in a sectional way, two or three thousand, but God says, Take with you all the people of war. We should understand that we cannot hold aloof from or stand out of any spiritual conflict. There is a great disposition to do so; we know the principle of neutrality has been formally declared among the people of God; it has been set up as a principle. It is spiritual wickedness; it is monstrous to think that the people of God are not to move together in the conflict. We should say that all the people of God are to move together in the enjoyment of privilege; if we do, we must move together in conflict. If any conflict arises that has any bearing on the inheritance, every man in Israel must be in it.

The element of unfaithfulness caused great distress to Joshua; the absence of Jehovah's support distressed him

greatly, and he lay on his face. He had to learn that some unfaithfulness had come in which characterised all Israel. A principle of unfaithfulness affecting one individual, if not judged, contaminates all Israel, so that even a spiritual element is hindered. No amount of good will neutralise an element of evil. The evil must be judged, and, as soon as it is, God can go on with His people; if it is not judged, He cannot go on with them. However many devoted and spiritual men there may be, if an element of evil is unjudged, God cannot go on with His people. It is a searching exercise, and shows the character of divine holiness. Joshua was equal to the situation here, and in the chapter before when he got the mind of God. The action of God was restrained, and Joshua, representing the people as led by the Spirit of Christ, has to go through deep exercise, and he and all the people have to judge these unfaithful elements. They have to take Achan and his house and his ill-gotten gains and burn them with fire and put a heap of stones on them. Then God can resume complacent relations with His people and tell them how victory is to be got over Ai. They had had to learn defeat; and the first thing that contributed to it was that they under-estimated the power of the enemy. When we get out of communion we always think less of the work and power of the enemy than we ought to. It is very important to take a proper estimate of the enemy, and it is the mark of a good general to rightly estimate the enemy he has to do with. Paul did not under-estimate the foe; he speaks of high things, strongholds, and imaginations that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, and in Ephesians 5 he speaks about universal lords of darkness, principalities and authorities. He clothes the enemy with titles of impressive dignity. It was the same with the Lord. In reading the Psalms that are personal to Christ we see that He never under-estimated His enemies. In His reference to His adversaries, those who hated Him, all these Psalms show what a just estimate He had of the

power of the enemy.

Human power is absolutely futile; it can do nothing. The smallest bit of the enemy's power is too much for me. Ai was a tiny place, but it was too much for them. If we think we are a match for the enemy's power we shall be defeated. Nothing will meet the enemy's power but the work of God in His people and the action of His Spirit—those are the two lessons of Ai. The work of God in His people is the ambush, and the action of the Spirit of Christ publicly is the stretching out of the javelin; and the two answer one to the other.

Satan can imitate light; he shows himself an angel of light, but he cannot imitate life. He cannot imitate what is wrought of God in the souls of His people; everything in conflict depends on that—that is the ambush behind the city. God meets the enemy in a way that he never expected—by His work in the souls of His people. That always baffles the enemy. Light does not baffle him; often the greatest adversaries of the truth are those who have light. Joshua represents the Spirit of Christ. Jehovah's word was, "Set an ambush," and Joshua obeys Him. He arose and took all the people of war, and he chose thirty thousand valiant men. The suggestion is that God hides what He does from the enemy; He works secretly in a way that the enemy does not suspect. I believe that represents the work of God in the souls of His people which the enemy never anticipated. It is expression in life, what is vitally wrought. Job had to meet the power of the enemy, but the enemy found elements in Job that he never expected to find. The ambush was there, something wrought of God, hidden from the enemy. Satan says, Do this and that and Job will curse you—he did not take account of the work of God in Job's soul.

It is a blessed thing when elements of unfaithfulness are so judged that God can energise His work in His people. His work is always there, but God is not always able to energise it so that it becomes effective against the

enemy. The thirty thousand and five thousand valiant men are typical of those in whom the work of God is energised. This ambush is set behind the city; it is something which the adversaries cannot follow; they are not aware of it. When Joshua stretches out his javelin, the two work together; the moment he stretched out his javelin they rose up. What is wrought of God in His people always answers to any public token which the Spirit may give at any moment. I think that Joshua stretching out the javelin towards Ai indicates the public token. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall raise up a standard against him," Isa. 59: 19. There is a public token in the outstretched javelin that was never let down until every one of the inhabitants of Ai were gone. There was something here which was at work to hinder the people of God from enjoying their God-given portion. All the spoil of Ai was to be for the people; all the spoil of Jericho was for God—God's portion comes first. In Ai it was a question of the people's portion; it represents the whole system of spiritual wickedness which stands up to prevent the people of God from enjoying the house of God, its wealth, its food, and its privileges. Bethel and Ai go together. Ai means a heap, and it sets forth the whole heap of things which prevent the people of God from enjoying things. Bethel is the house of God. The two go together, and both are united in this particular part of the conflict. Ai gives the negative side and Bethel the positive side, because it has to do with the portion of the people of God. Joshua said, All the spoil of Ai is for you. The epistle to the Galatians is like Ai; great spiritual forces are at work to rob the people of God of their God-given portion. It is met by the work of God in the souls of His people. Paul says, "I have confidence in you through the Lord." He had confidence that there was a divine work in them. The epistle is like Joshua holding out the javelin. Galatians is a very militant epistle. The work of God answers there to the testimony

given, to the holding out of the javelin. The troubler has to bear his guilt and be destroyed.

The character of Jehovah's land was vindicated in the burial of the king of Ai. God had given a commandment that, if a man was hanged, his body was not to be left there all night. It was to be taken down before sunset; the land was not to be defiled, for it was Jehovah's land. The taking down of the king of Ai and burying him signified that the land was Jehovah's and had to be preserved from defilement, so that God might be worshipped there and honoured in the testimony of His people.

If God gets what is due to Him in the spoil of Jericho and the people get their portion in the spoil of Ai, the whole object of heavenly warfare is secured. The result comes out in the latter portion of this chapter 8; that is, the people are seen in their true place Godward and manward. They are seen as worshippers now; they have been warriors up to this point. At Jericho and Ai they are warriors, but at mount Ebal they become worshippers, and that is the result of spiritual victories.

There seems to be a kind of moral link between the stones in the earlier chapter and the stones here. We have seen the stones of memorial in Gilgal and in Jordan representing all the people of God, but here we have stones put together as an altar. We are not told here that there were twelve stones, but we know that, when Elijah built his altar, he was careful to have twelve stones. The stones represent the people of God viewed from the standpoint of divine purpose and calling, and they are viewed in this type as set together in view of worship. The stones in this book represent the people of God as after the order of Christ by divine calling and constitution; they are not humanly formed; no human tool has anything to do with their formation. They are whole stones, viewed as purely the product of the work of God. The altar here suggests the people of God put together in view of the service of God, in view of the burnt offering and the peace offering,

which would be worship. The stones being built together as the altar suggest the saints as divinely set together so that they can become the means by which God is served in relation to Christ, for the burnt offering and the peace offering speak of Christ.

The enemy is overthrown so that God may have a worshipping people, and a people who are a large and fair copy of His own blessed will so that everybody can see it just as they saw it in Christ. So here the ark is brought in, and not only the ark—Christ personally—but a people who stand on this side and that side of the ark, a people morally identified with Christ so that what was true in Christ becomes true in them. What a beautiful spectacle in the land—an altar and a large and legibly written copy of the law! This is a type of what will be brought about in Israel. God will write His law in their hearts and minds; and, if it is written in the inward parts of a man, it will be expressed to his outward parts.

This incident closes the chapter, bringing the matter to a divine conclusion. Jericho has been overthrown; there is nothing left to challenge the rights of God, and Ai has been overthrown—there has been nothing left to challenge the blessing of His people. Now what is the result? There is an altar, a people identified with the ark; and there is an immense tablet on which the law is written very plainly.

It is interesting that the altar was set up on mount Ebal whence the curses came. In Deuteronomy we only have the curses; we are told of six tribes cursing and six blessing, but when we come to the detail of it we only have the curses. That suggests to me that, if we can say Amen to the curses, the blessings will be all right. If we are in harmony with the judgment of God in connection with everything displeasing to Him, there is no fear of us; the blessings will be all right. We cannot say Amen to the curses and miss the blessings; the blessings practically depend on our saying Amen to the curses. Everything

that is under the curse with God is to be under the curse with us; and if we are in that position there is no question at all about the enjoyment of the blessings.

In John 3 we accept the condemnation of the man after the flesh in the lifting up of the brazen serpent—that clears the ground so that there can be spirit and truth in the soul, and worship flows out of it. Worship is more an attitude and appreciation of Christ; they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and according to Deuteronomy 27 they ate together and rejoiced before Jehovah. It is a blessed scene, not only of worship but of fellowship. The burnt offering speaks of Christ as the ground of acceptance with God; we come before God in the joy of that, we are identified with the acceptability of Christ, so that we can speak of Christ to the blessed God out of spirit and truth. On the other hand our fellowship is formed, we can eat together and have common thoughts of Christ, so that the worship Godward and the fellowship of one another go together. If there is no worship there is no fellowship. It is a wonderful picture—the altar set up in the land and the people standing on both sides identified with the ark. It is a profound delight to God to see His people unified in appreciation of Christ: it springs from God's pleasure and goes back to Him.

Joshua "wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses which he had written before the children of Israel." The law is written on this great public tablet big enough for the whole law to be written very plainly. If the people of God were set together according to the mind of God they would be a fair copy of everything that is in the will of God; people would be able to look at them and see that will written practically and livingly on them. I suppose the two things balance each other—in proportion as we have altar character Godward we shall have this stone character manward. If we have divine worship and divine fellowship on the one hand, there is public testimony on the other; it covers the whole position. Towards God

worship, among ourselves fellowship, and towards man testimony.

What is in the Bible is to be in the saints; there is no living witness until it is in the saints. Moses wrote the law in a book as a witness against the children of Israel, as we read in Deuteronomy 31. That is the solemn thing to-day; the Bible is a divine witness against God's people, because what is written in the book is not written in them. What a terrible thing that the book of God should become a solemn, divine witness against the people of God! God's thought was not that, but that His people should be a legible copy of what was written in the book—that is the copy that men take account of. Men do not care much for the Bible, but they would be greatly affected if they saw the Bible livingly in the people of God; that would move them, and they would begin to think that there was something in it after all.

Then there was the reading of the law, which is very important. "All Israel and their elders, and their officers and judges, stood on this side and on that side of the ark before the priests the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, as well the stranger as the home-born Israelite; half of them toward Mount Gerizim, and the other half of them toward Mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of Jehovah had commanded, that they should bless the people of Israel, in the beginning. And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua read not before the whole congregation of Israel, and the women, and the children, and the strangers that lived among them." We have a company now, the whole assembly, including the women and children, viewed as in such a state that every word that had been written could be read in their hearing. They were in correspondence with the blessing and in correspondence with the curses. It says that there was not a word that

Joshua did not read. I fancy there are a great many words that we do not read. There are things we pass over because we are not prepared for them; we are not prepared to listen to that particular word. Responsibility is connected with hearing—"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," Matt. 11: 15. When we hear we come under responsibility and it is solemn.

Writing in Scripture is connected with what God does in the souls of His people. He says, "I will put my law in their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." Paul says to the Corinthians, "Ye are manifested to be Christ's epistle ministered by us, written, not with ink, but the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tables, but on fleshy tables of the heart." The writing is what God does, but the reading is connected with our responsibility. If God speaks I am responsible to hear, and God expects His people, when they hear, to say Amen.

CHAPTER 9

We see here in the coming of the Gibeonites a picture of how the enemy would work, not now in the way of unfaithfulness among the people of God as in Achan, but as introducing foreign elements and getting them accepted.

The responsibility rested on the princes; they answer to those who lead among the people of God in our day. They might have thought according to Deuteronomy 20 that they were right to make peace with those at a distance, but we have to distinguish between things that differ. Evangelical principles, if not kept in their right place, might be destructive of assembly principles. It shows the importance of enquiring of the Lord when people want to come into fellowship; otherwise there may be a very fair show of being right, but in receiving persons principles may be received that are not of God. The New Testament

speaks of those who had come in surreptitiously to spy out their liberty; there were those who had got in under false pretences. Jude speaks of those who had crept in unawares; they got in slyly and unobserved. That kind of thing seems to be illustrated here, the subtle ways of the enemy to get foreign elements introduced among the people of God. The Gibeonites were Hivites, and they never ceased to be Hivites; they never became Israelites, so that their presence as being in league or covenant with Israel must always have been a lowering of the true character of Israel.

The Gibeonites were persons who had not come under spiritual motives. Such persons see that there is a certain selfish advantage to be derived from being in league with the people of God. That is how Satan works; he presents a certain advantage to be gained by walking with the people of God, some benefit to be derived that is not of a spiritual character. The Gibeonites used the name of Jehovah: "We have come because of the name of Jehovah." They say, "We are your servants." They present themselves in a nice way, and it is these nice people that we have to beware of, not the people who come gnashing their teeth.

It is a striking thing that they took of their victuals; it is a very serious matter to take victuals from people until you know where they come from. If you take victuals from them you have given yourself away. They were deceived; there was all the appearance of what was right; the Gibeonites' shoes and clothes were ragged, their bottles were rent, and their bread mouldy; it seemed to show that they had come a long way. All that they had appeared to be old. In a general way in Christendom Satan works by what is old; people are impressed by what bears the mark of antiquity. It all seemed very pious; they seemed to be honouring the Lord. We are often deceived by pious talk. I know how easy it is, for I have been deceived myself by pious talk and a pious demeanour, and

have not seen that underneath that talk and appearance there are principles that are altogether foreign to the Israel of God. We have to consider what the true character of the Israel of God is. The danger is that the Hivites come in the guise, not of a foe but of a friend, and say, Make a league with us. They come without a sword and a spear; if they had come with them the Israelites would have known what to do. That is the way that unspiritual elements have come in among the people of God. It is much easier to let them in than to get rid of them. Israel never got rid of the Gibeonites and it was not God's way that they should; but it was a constant reproach in Israel that there should be service connected with the house of God and with the altar that was of a servile nature, and not the service of sons. If the Gibeonites are connected with the house it is only to serve as bondmen and not as sons. Every time an Israelite had his wood chopped by a Gibeonite, and every barrow full of wood he saw carried into the temple by a Gibeonite, must have reminded him of that element which came in through their not seeking counsel of the mouth of Jehovah.

We read later, 2 Samuel 21, that "in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah" Saul slew the Gibeonites. Saul was an impatient man, and he applied a human remedy to an acknowledged defeat. He said, These Hivites were not of Israel, and in his impatience and zeal he would have destroyed them. But he dishonoured the Lord as much and more than Joshua and the princes did by letting them in. Mistakes may be made by the people of God, and it is not God's way that they should be removed. In a general way His people have to abide by the results, and have to act in such a way as is suitable to God. We may make mistakes, but it is no use to say, I have made a mistake and I will undo it. No, God says that if we make a mistake we have to abide by it; we have to submit and learn to behave in a way that is suitable to His name. Israel had to learn what was suitable to the name of the Lord; it was not a

question of what was suitable to Israel or how to deal with the Gibeonites, but what was suitable to the name of the Lord.

The princes did not enquire at the mouth of Jehovah. It is a searching thing that we do things without enquiring at the mouth of Jehovah and then find out that we have made a mistake, and it is no wonder. The government of God came in because of the mistake, and they had to suffer the presence of this people for evermore. It is not always God's way to correct mistakes in the church. The effects remain and have to be worked out to a final issue—that makes it so solemn if we make a mistake, especially an assembly mistake. Perhaps people think it is a very nice thing to have a few more in fellowship. The Gibeonites came and presented themselves as allies, and perhaps the princes thought it a nice thing to have a few more to give a helping hand with the enemies, so they took them in.

I should be afraid to suggest to anyone that they should take a path of separation if they were not up to it. If people take that path without being prepared for it they will only do it in a servile spirit, and then after thirty years go out and say, Now I have found liberty—that is a Gibeonite. It is a serious thing to serve in a spirit that is under God's curse, a servile spirit. Joshua said, "Now therefore ye are cursed"—and they remained as a cursed, servile people who never ministered to the pleasure of God; they were tributaries but not contributory. These things are written as warnings for us—if I read this chapter it should raise an excercise, Am I a Gibeonite? Have I a place among the people of God more or less under false pretences? The Lord can make anything tributary; the very presence of unspiritual elements in the assembly can be made tributary, but not contributory. All the elements of weakness and failure which Satan has introduced are tributary because God uses these things to exercise His people, therefore He overrules it and turns it to good

account, but that does not make it pleasurable to Him. The Gibeonites' service was never pleasurable to Him; He says, "Let my son go, that he may serve me"—the Gibeonites were never sons, they were servile to the end. Someone was talking to me to-day about the absence of spring among Christians; there is not the spring there should be in the service and praise of God, hearts breaking forth happily and freely; we get on to the line of what is servile. Hewing wood and drawing water was always for others. It is possible to be in fellowship for many years without having much real touch with divine things.

The princes recognised that nothing but a servile character of things could be taken up by such a people; and, though they had been wrong in swearing to them, they had to stand by their oath because Jehovah's name had become connected with it. If people are received among us, it does not alter the obligation. We see that we behave towards them according to Jehovah's name. What is due and worthy of that name is always to govern us.

CHAPTER 10

This chapter is very interesting, because though the place the Gibeonites had taken in connection with Israel was taken deceitfully and through want of exercise and enquiry of God on the part of His people, yet God overrules it in order to bring all the force of the enemy into evidence so that they might be completely destroyed. It shows the wonderful way that God can overrule the introduction of unspiritual elements among His people in order to bring out the power of what is heavenly. The Gibeonites had no power; they were not able to defend themselves. They were among the people of God without liberty or power of sonship. They were like Lot, who had no power when the adversary came. He fell captive, and,

if there had not been a spiritual man not far off with plenty of trained servants, he would have remained in captivity.

We have three lessons in these earlier chapters of Joshua which are most important in view of the conflict. First, the power of the ark at Jericho, the power of Christ as the ark of the covenant. Second, at Ai we have in type the work of God in the souls of His people which always answers to the javelin of Joshua; the work of God in His people always answers to any standard the Spirit raises at any particular moment. The third lesson is at Bethhoron in chapter 10, where we see the direct intervention of heaven. These are three great elements of spiritual victory.

The hailstones, and sun and moon standing still, look on to the future when God will actually crush the power of the enemy. Every spiritual power of wickedness will be annihilated by the direct intervention of heaven; and the saints are in the light of that now. It is striking that we see here the direct action of heaven, which we have not had before in the book. The hailstones make one thing of the time when the angel will pour out the seventh bowl in Revelation, and the hailstones will come down weighing a hundredweight each. Who can stand against that? It is the power that operates from heaven and will bring everything down; every enemy will be laid low. The sun and moon will stand still. The hailstones speak of destructive power, but the sun and moon standing still, or literally *being silent,* speak of the wonderful place in which Christ is at present as the glorified One. He is standing still in the heavens, and is going to stand still there until every spiritual power which is hostile to God and His people is laid low. The sun and moon are both seen above the horizon at the same time. The moon is the church seen in conjunction with a glorified Christ, answering to Him and reflecting Him. If we had a sense in our souls of the present place of Christ as the sun in the heavens, it would

deliver us from every suggestion of spiritual wickedness.

The hailstones represent the providential intervention of God in support of the truth. This is rather in contrast to the heavenly influence of the sun. The hailstones are forcible things, especially when they weigh a hundredweight. The influence of the sun is genial; it acts on the principle of attraction. Light and warmth and life-giving influence flow from the sun. If there is conflict, light comes from the Head. The sun is a glorious figure of the headship of Christ, rather than of His lordship. Just as the sun holds the whole solar system together by the power of attraction, so Christ as Head holds everything together by the power of attraction, and He gives light to His people for conflict. There is a spiritual light shining in Christ as the sun in the heavens, so that the saints may be able to pursue the conflict until every enemy is killed. Then there is also the providential side. At the Reformation there was a shining of the light of the sun, and precious truth was given from Christ as Head: justification by faith, and the authority of the Scriptures. Then there were hailstones: the world powers, the king of England and others, rose up and threw off the yoke of Rome—that was like the hailstones, providential happenings coming in to break the powers of evil.

We see Christ as the sun in the heavens at the end of Ephesians 1. The apostle is praying, and at the close of his prayer he stops when he thinks of the greatness of Christ: "the exceeding greatness of his power which he wrought in Christ in raising him from among the dead." He stops praying and starts teaching: "and he set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come, and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all." That is the sun standing still in the heavens. The Son of God has been standing

still in the midst of the heavens for nearly two thousand years. We are in the greatest day possible; it would be better to live one day now than a hundred years in the time of Methuselah.

The sun remained standing about a full day, and there was no day like it before or since. That is the spiritual and heavenly character of the present day. There is a glorified Christ in the heavens, and there is a company down here answering to it like the moon; and in the light of that there is power to overthrow every evil element that can possibly arise. Under the leading of the Spirit we can keep the sun and the moon in evidence as long as the day of conflict continues, until there is not another Amorite. I believe the whole incident is a rebuke from Jehovah, for I think the motive of the princes must have been that they wanted allies, and God rebukes them by showing that all the power of the heavens is with them and for them. What were a few Gibeonites who, after all, could not stand up for themselves, much less for Israel!

In Acts 16 Paul rebuked the girl with the spirit of Python; he would not have a Gibeonitish ally; and we find something that very much answers to the power from heaven in the earthquake. It seems to suggest that the saints in their conflict with spiritual wickedness are in the full light of the day, the light of a glorified Christ sitting at the right hand of God until His foes are made His footstool—that is the light of the day and the church is seen corresponding with Him and answering to Him.

The completeness of the victory is seen in verses 22—27 when Joshua calls on the men of Israel to put their feet on the necks of the five kings. That answers to the last chapter of Romans: "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." There will be complete victory over all the power of evil, and the saints are called to have part in it.

CHAPTERS 11 & 12

We have noticed before that three parts of the conflict recorded in this book are brought before us in detail; that is, Jericho, Ai and Gibeon. All the rest of the conflict is not dwelt on in detail; it is simply recorded that Joshua and all Israel with him moved from one city to another in a course of victory, until it can be said at the end of chapter 11 that the land rested from war. There were details still to be dealt with, but practically the conflict is over. The different victories now recorded have the character of overcoming which is to mark the saints; they are to be marked by overcoming and victorious power. Many times it is said, "Joshua and all Israel"—the whole company moves together. At Ai they moved sectionally and there was disaster, but after that they moved altogether.

The character of overcoming that belongs to the assembly is typified here; we do not see individual overcoming. In Ephesians the conflict is assembly conflict, but in Revelation we have ruin and departure and the overcoming becomes individual. But we are in the light of Ephesians, and every part of the truth is vital in the estimation of all the saints; that is, it is so normally. If there is conflict in regard of dispossessing the enemy and breaking his power, it is a matter of personal interest to every saint on earth. Certain things are normal to the whole assembly and each one of us has to come to them individually; but these things belong to the assembly, not to any individual.

This answers to the thought of overcoming in John's writings; it would help us if we took account of these chapters in that light. I believe that overcoming in John's writings is distinctly the warfare of the land, not wilderness warfare. We have the latter in Romans and Galatians, but in John it is warfare in the land, both in the

gospel and in the epistle. In the gospel of John the Lord Himself is the great Overcomer. We begin by looking at the ark of Jehovah; we see the will of God brought in in a divine Person in manhood. We see the Son of God come in flesh; He is the great Overcomer, and nothing can stand before Him. "I have overcome the world"—that is almost His last word. He is the great Overcomer, and it is in keeping Him before us that we get power. I never get power by thinking of the man who cannot overcome, and I may get despondent over it; I shall never get power that way, but weakness. Power comes in considering the One who says, "I have overcome." In John's gospel we see the ark of Jehovah, not exactly the ark of the covenant that secures all for man—that is Luke, but it is the ark of Jehovah, God's will absolutely secured in a Man, His own beloved Son, and nothing can touch that.

In John's gospel we find not only the ark of Jehovah, One who can say, "The ruler of this world comes and has nothing in me," but He does not leave this world until He has secured a generation that is no more of the world than He is. That is the great truth of John's gospel. The ark of Jehovah is the Son of God. The man in John 9 is a typical overcomer; he goes step by step in the path of light until he comes into the full light of the Son of God. In John we have the religious world, not the profane world.

In believing that Jesus is the Son of God we should get light as to all that the world is. In John's gospel everything is really the opposite to what it appears. It appeared as if the Son of God was judged when He was condemned to death, but really the world was judged on the part of the Son of God. The public judgment of the cross was that He was a criminal, a malefactor not fit to live; but, looking at it rightly, the world is judged—"Now is the judgment of this world." The whole system of this world that rejected Him is judged. What kind of world could it be that could not tolerate the Son of God! The rulers and princes of this world cast Him out publicly—it was the Son of

God they cast out! What did Peter, John and all the rest think of the religious world in the light of the faith of the Son of God? What did they think of the gorgeous ritual of the temple? It all fell to the ground with a crash. It had rejected the Son of God—what was it after that to them? The world to them was a judged thing—not the world of newspapers, theatres, and novels, but the religious world, the Jewish world where the Lord was during all His life, the professed people of God—that is what we have to overcome to-day. It is that which is more hateful to God than the lusts of men. The lusts of men are bad enough, but the religious pride of man is more hateful to God. Babylon indicates that. Look at the woman in John 8—there was more room in her for the light of God than there was in the Pharisees; there was no room in their hearts for the light of God. It is a solemn thing for us to face the fact that we have to judge every element in the world, and particularly the elements that take a religious form. The world had a religious form when the Lord was here; it was full of elements that came from beneath. The Lord says in John 8, "Ye are of the things beneath, I am of the things above." Satan holds men more by religious influences than anything else.

We have to estimate things according to the demonstration of the Spirit. Those begotten of God are able to receive the Spirit's demonstration about the world in every aspect. There were thirty-one kings mentioned here, which shows how many different forms the power of evil may take; but we can judge it all by the demonstration of the Spirit. The Spirit brings demonstration to the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. The demonstration is effective in the affections of the saints. The saints say, Everything here is marked by sin, because they do not believe on the Son of God. There is no righteousness in the world system because it has rejected Him, and He has gone to the Father. The conviction is in the souls of the saints, not in the unconverted man. "When he is come, he

shall bring demonstration." He brings demonstration that everything of the religious world system is marked by sin and the absence of righteousness. All is under the rule of Satan, but Satan's rule will be fully exposed and judged.

The man in John 9 was cast out because they could not fit him in; there was no place in the synagogue for a man like that, and if people confess the Son of God according to their measure of light they will find that they are cast out; they will not be put to the trouble of going out. The Lord was putting forth His own sheep. The two words are the same; "they *cast* him *out*" is the same word as the Lord uses when He *puts forth* His own sheep. The man who was cast out was the man whom the Lord put forth as one of His sheep. If we have faith in the Son of God, if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and move on the line of being begotten of God, we shall be preserved from every one of the thirty-one kings. There is not one of them that we shall want to spare; they have all to be slain. The world takes many forms; John in his epistle says that there are many antichrists. He does not speak about the personal antichrist, but he wants us to think of the many; they have all to be overcome.

There is a great power residing in the saints, so we find that whatever Jehovah said to Moses and Moses said to Joshua comes to pass; there is not a single foe left in these chapters that can stand up against Joshua and all Israel with him. There is a unity about it that baffles Satan. The Lord's last word to the church viewed in responsibility is to remind the church that He is the great Overcomer. It is the only reference to what He was personally that we have in any of His addresses to the seven churches: His last word is, "Even as I also overcame and am set down with my father in his throne." He is the great Overcomer.

There is a moment reached when the fighting is over and Joshua and Eleazar could proceed to allot the inheritance. Fighting is dealing with the opposing

powers, but these powers are dealt with in view of the inheritance being enjoyed. We find, as a matter of fact, that every enemy was not destroyed; even giants are left, and Philistines and Sidonians and Jebusites and other people. That is how it is practically; the enemies are not all destroyed, so there is still some fighting left for us to do. People have an idea that we are to stand still and see everything done for us. That is true if you are at the Red Sea; but in the land you are not to stand still and see everything done for you; you have to buckle on your armour and fight. I remember a brother once went to a place where an evangelist had been labouring for some months, and he said to the people, 'Mr.—— has been telling you how easy it is to be saved, but I am come to tell you how hard it is to be saved!' Both things are true.

The Lord provides rest; it is not all fighting. When we come together on Lord's day morning we do not come to fight; the Lord is pleased to give His people a resting-place. The ark went three days journey to seek out a resting-place. The Lord delights to seek out a resting-place for His people. It is not all conflict; the inheritance is enjoyed.

CHAPTERS 13 & 14

In the beginning of chapter 13 Jehovah says to Joshua, "Thou art old, advanced in days, and there remaineth yet very much land to take possession of." This seems to indicate the weakening of spiritual lead amongst the people of God. We find the contrast in Caleb in chapter 14, and this is very encouraging for us, because, if we have to feel deeply that we have no longer the leading of apostolic power, yet we can see in Caleb a spirit that goes through to the end. I think what is said of Joshua suggests the passing of the energy of spiritual leading found in the

apostles. We can see that every power of darkness fell before the apostles; there was then a spiritual power for leading in the Spirit of Christ that nothing could stand against, but it was not God's way to continue it in the assembly. My impression is that Caleb represents a spirit that would go right through to the end. Paul and Timothy very much illustrate it. Paul was in prison and ready to depart, old and advanced in days. That powerful spiritual leading was about to be removed, but Paul's great exercise was that Timothy should be a true Caleb. It seems to me an implied contrast between the failing strength of Joshua which is clearly suggested, and the undiminished strength of Caleb which was as strong for war as it was forty-five years before. There is an undiminished, undecayed energy in Caleb. It is the Caleb element that we want for the inheritance.

We find afterwards that the people served Jehovah as long as Joshua lived, and as long as the elders that knew him lived. It suggests that there was a preservative power in the assembly in the persons of the apostles, and that power passed away. It left an impression on those conversant with the apostles, but it has passed away and we shall never have it again. There will never be that spiritual energy in the church that there was in the apostles, though we have their ministry in the Scriptures, but it is interesting to see that what does not pass away is the Caleb spirit. Joshua does not fight any more after chapter 11. Now it is a question of taking possession; the power of the enemy has been broken. In a sense we can say it has been broken by the power of the Spirit in the apostles.

Now in the presence of Joshua being old and passing away God calls attention to the dividing of the land by lot. He calls attention to His own determinate purpose, His own purpose in grace, given to the saints in Christ Jesus—that answers to the land being divided by lot. He says to Joshua, "Thou art old and advanced in days and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed of."

Then there is a statement of various parts of the land and then God says, "I will dispossess them before the children of Israel. Only partition it by lot to the children of Israel for an inheritance as I have commanded thee," verse 6. This shows that what was in the purpose of God for His people comes into prominence at a time when spiritual leadership may be enfeebled, so that when Paul writes 2 Timothy he most emphatically calls attention to the purpose of God in Christ Jesus. If Paul was going, the purpose of God was not to be changed, or diminished, or defeated; it was to be carried through. Jehovah says here to Joshua, You are going, but I will secure the inheritance for my people. The point in 2 Timothy is that everything is secured on the line of divine purpose. That was brought in to encourage Timothy, who was a comparatively feeble vessel. We see a vessel of extraordinary energy in Paul, but in Timothy a man of tears who needs to be encouraged and exhorted not to be ashamed, exhorted to rekindle the gift that was in him. It seems to suggest that his faith was burning low because of all the conditions around him. Paul encourages and strengthens him, and tells him to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; that goes back to God's purpose.

Proverbs 16 tells us, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole decision is of Jehovah." If it is a question of lot, Jehovah decides; that is firmly established in chapter 13, and in chapters 14 and 15 God works out His purpose through moral conditions. In Caleb and Achsah his daughter we see moral conditions which are necessary in order that God may effectuate His purposes. God could not consistently with Himself effectuate His purpose except in moral conditions which are suitable.

Think of these two old men standing up before all Israel and talking to one another like this! The principle of the inheritance was secured in Caleb, and Joshua was a chosen warrior. We see the wonderful way in which Jehovah had captured and kept Caleb's affections. Joshua is

a type of spiritual power and the element of spiritual leading among the saints. A true Caleb would not make the heart of the people melt; he wholly followed Jehovah his God—that is what we need now. It is so easy to be disheartening one another; it is easy to see difficulties and to create them when we do not see them. Some are on the line of creating difficulties and disheartening the saints in the path of faith. One would not care to be on that line; Caleb said, I have wholly followed Jehovah my God: he definitely had Jehovah before him in his affections, and he was moving after him with his whole heart. It did not matter to Caleb how many spies brought false reports; it was "a very, very good land" to Caleb, and Caleb had established his title. The inheritance was in Caleb before Caleb was in the inheritance. The other men could tell out what they saw with their eyes, but Caleb says, I told them as it was in my heart. That makes all the difference; we expose ourselves. The light was in Caleb; it is a great thing to have things in us. If there is nothing in us we shall fail and discourage others; if there is something divinely wrought in us, that stands. It is said of Satan that "he abode not in the truth"; he must have been there in a sense, but there was no truth in him. One may be in the truth positionally and not have the truth in us; being in the truth is that it surrounds us, but having the truth in us is another matter. Caleb brought word as it was in his heart; the land was in Caleb's heart according to the love that had given it. He had Jehovah before him, and Jehovah had given the land in love to His people; therefore it must be a very, very good land. Caleb sees no difficulties; he sees everything to attract and nothing to dismay.

The Lord could say, "Thy law is within my heart," and He presents Himself to us in Psalm 16 as the One who stood in the inheritance: "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." "Jehovah is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup; thou

maintainest my lot." He stood, and was the only One who ever did stand, in the full scope of the inheritance, and all that it was in the purpose of God's heart to give to man.

I suppose that Judah takes the lead in precedence to Joseph because of the character of Caleb. Caleb was the prince of Judah, and his character was such that he secured for Judah pre-eminence in the allotment of the inheritance. Ephraim and Manasseh should have been first; theirs was the birthright, but Judah comes in first under cover of the prince, Caleb. It shows how one man of faith can secure prominence in the inheritance to his tribe; it is not only his own benefit, but his whole tribe benefits—Caleb was the prince of Judah.

It is profoundly interesting to me that Hebron was the first city to be inherited; it gives us the great element of the inheritance to be secured. Hebron means *Company* and it suggests the enjoyment together in family conditions of what is given to us of God. It suggests the fellowship viewed from John's point of view. Kirjath-arba is the city of Arba and we are told he was a great man among the Anakim. It is the great men who have been the hindrance to fellowship in christendom. Hebron is connected with God's original thought to set His people together in companionship—that is the great thought of God, and it is what Satan has resisted from the outset. He has always been seeking to bring in elements that would oppose the companionship, the family fellowship of the people of God.

In Anak's three sons, chapter 15: 14, we see principles that Satan sets up to hinder; and we have to take up in spiritual power the setting aside of man after the flesh. If that man goes, the three sons of Anak go; their execution is secured. I think their names are very suggestive. Sheshai means *free*; he represents the principle of free thought. Ahiman means *brother of man*; it is a human brotherhood on the basis of free thought. Talmai means *bold* or *spirited;* that is in contrast to the spirit of

subjection that marks the people of God. Satan opposes the principle of the companionship of God's people by bringing in this principle of human brotherhood on the basis of free thought. Your thoughts are not to be cramped or held by the Bible; you must be free, and you must consider for man, be a brother of men. We hear of all such talks of brotherhood to-day, but they are all of human kind and are marked by insubjection to God—man asserting his rights in a bold and spirited way and boasting of lawlessness. These are sons of Anak, and have to be displaced; the spirit of these things has to be displaced in our hearts if Kirjath-arba is to become Hebron.

Joshua blessing Caleb, verse 13, answers to what has been said of Paul blessing Timothy. Paul passes the inheritance, so to speak, into the hands of Timothy, and leaves him to maintain it. Joshua had been conversant for many years with Caleb and could discern what was suitable about him. He was not one who shrank from difficulties; he asked for a place where there were the greatest difficulties. Do we covet difficulties? Caleb did, and asked for the most difficult place there was.

I think we are too general in our thoughts of the inheritance. We can look at it in a general way as outlined in Numbers 34, but we do not take possession in a general way. When it comes to possession, the inheritance is divided by lot; there is a specific portion for each tribe. That is a very important exercise for us, and, in connection with that, no doubt we have all noticed that the land on the east side of Jordan is never said to be divided by lot.

Division by lot is connected with the sovereignty of divine purpose in Christ Jesus. "In Christ Jesus" is a characteristic of 2 Timothy. It comes in in different connections; it is connected with the sovereignty of God in relation to His anointed Man, the risen and glorified Man; all is secured in Him. This distinctive portion is given to each tribe, but the great exercise is that we should

possess it. We are too general; we think of the purposes of God in Christ Jesus in its general aspect as being the portion of all saints, but that is too big for me. The blessing of God in Christ Jesus *is* for all saints, and all are there, but have I found out what part of "in Christ Jesus" is my portion? I have something distinctive, and the saints in any locality have something distinctive. I am put in companionship locally with the children of God—that is the local company. But Hebron is only one city in Judah. There are a great many cities in Judah, and they are all grouped together as the inheritance of one tribe. There must be something to answer to it spiritually; it is part of the inspired word of God and I must take heed to it, and think how the inheritance is taken up. It is taken up collectively. Divine light comes to us at the present time and would result in our moving on the line of 2 Timothy, because that is the only way in which we can reach divine companionship with the saints. If we try to reach companionship on any other principle, it means the sacrifice of everything that is for God.

Chapter 15 refers to the inheritance of the tribes "according to their families." Spiritual salvation depends on our taking up in family affections our links with the people of God, not only locally, in the sense of each local assembly, but in a tribal way. In the Songs of Degrees reference is made to the tribes going up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where Jehovah sets His name, and every tribe must come there. Jerusalem represents the universal bond of the people of God; everything was centralised at Jerusalem, and everything is centralised in the Spirit. When we come together locally to break bread there might be things connected with us locally that have to be mentioned; we mention any one commended to us for fellowship, and any local interests of the Lord which stand in relation to His rights in the assembly. But when we have taken the Supper, if the Lord is pleased to manifest Himself to us, He leads us out of what is local,

He takes us to Jerusalem; He leads us to what is universal and outside time altogether. That is why we do not care to connect the notices with the latter part of the meeting, because the notices are local. The spiritual worship of the saints is universal and outside time conditions: we sometimes sing, "Eternity's begun." If we reach the presence of the Lord, that is not local; that belongs to universal, spiritual privilege. If I am speaking to the Father or to God in a priestly way, we are outside what is local; it is universal. I mention this because there is a spiritual reason for things being done in God's assembly, and we ought to be exercised, not only to fall in with what is done, but to know why it is done. If we touch the spiritual region we are outside what is local. Brothers and sisters come together as brothers and sisters; that is the outward order of the assembly; we never leave it, we are always brothers and sisters, and sisters must be silent. That is the outward local order, but in the spiritual sphere there are no brothers or sisters, we are all in the same blessed relationship, and the inheritance is outside time. We are not in the inheritance outwardly, it depends on what we are spiritually.

I have my own spiritual constitution like Caleb; that is what I am personally. Then there is what I am locally, what I am in my own meeting, and there is what I am in my own tribe as united with all the people of God within reach. But when we go up to Jerusalem we leave all that and go up to spiritual privilege. We approach the Father in His own circle and circumstances, and we are outside what is personal, what is local; we are in the universal companionship of the whole assembly. That is the universal privilege of the assembly, outside time or locality.

The Lord's presence with His own does not depend on faith alone. It is "If ye love me"—it is all conditional on that. The Lord says, "And I will pray the Father," and then He says, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you." It is all a question of "If ye love me." He comes

to lovers, not to believers only.

We announce the Lord's death "*till he come.*" That has a local bearing; it is the public witness. The Lord's supper has many sides; that is one side, the public witness in the place where He died. We have a few feeble individuals or a greater company who come together to break bread and drink the cup; and it is God's solemn, public memorial of the death of His blessed Son. It is the most solemn thing in relation to the world; there is nothing so solemn as the saints eating the Supper; it is God's solemn witness to His murdered Son. If we were true to what the Supper is locally, it would be an open door by which we should pass to a spiritual region outside time and locality, where we could truly say, "Eternity's begun."

CHAPTER 15

These incidents which are dwelt on in detail are no doubt of very great importance as giving us the principles and the power in which the inheritance can be possessed and enjoyed. We have considered Caleb in chapter 14, and have seen in him, not simply faith, but the energy of love in which he wholly followed Jehovah. It is love that can truly take account of the purposes and pleasure of God in regard to the inheritance. Caleb's heart was commanded by Jehovah, so, if Jehovah had purposed to give the land, it was to Caleb a very good land. His affections were centred in Jehovah; he really had the spirit of sonship. He said, "If Jehovah delight in us, he will give us the land"; that is, he looked at it from the standpoint of Jehovah's delight in His people. I think that it is only love that can enter into God's delight in blessing His people. Caleb wholly followed Jehovah; whatever was before Jehovah was before Caleb. Timothy, in the New Testament, corresponds with Caleb as one who fully followed up what

Paul had set forth in regard to the purpose of God, the delight of God in His purposes of love; he was one who wholly followed. That is the kind of person who can possess the inheritance, and who can set aside "the great man" as Caleb did. "Now the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-arba; the great man among the Anakim." It is a great thing to dispossess the great man. Caleb dispossessed the great man and his three sons, and what has been the city of the great man becomes Hebron, which means company, the place where the companionship of the children of God can be enjoyed. It is the first city to be really possessed in the land; we read of victories over cities before, but the first city to become an inheritance is Hebron. It seems to indicate that fellowship with one another which John speaks of. I do not think that there is any fellowship, any divine companionship as long as the great man has a place. It is not only the great man but his mind that has to go. It is wonderful what is connected with Hebron; it becomes a city of refuge and a special portion of the children of Aaron, the chief priestly city in Israel.

Now I think we see in Achsah the product of the energy of love in Caleb. He had a daughter and she was marked by earnestness as to springs of water. This comes in consequent upon the introduction of Othniel, and the taking of Kirjath-sepher, which means *The city of the book*. In connection with the second city to be possessed, it is a question of the mind of man as stored up in books; it covers the whole literature of the world. It is possible to see that the man after the flesh, however great he is, is of no account with God and must be judged, that is, Kirjath-arba, and yet there may be a respect for the products of his mind, that man can write interesting books. What sort of books were written in Canaan? They may have had many interesting books, but we may be quite sure there was not a single book in Kirjath-sepher that was honouring to Jehovah or a help to His people. We do not need the

books that can be found in Kirjath-sepher. Christianity has been used to decorate the wrong man; even the name of Christ has been brought in and used to decorate and beautify the wrong man, so that the world is beautified and adorned by it. The finest buildings in the world are Christian buildings; the world is adorned by them; it is the wrong system and the wrong man adorned. You cannot connect Christ with this world at all. He is disallowed and cast out as worthless; that is the real judgment of Christ by the world. The stone is rejected by the builders.

It is very interesting to see that Othniel comes to light as being able to take that city. It suggests a continuation of things which would correspond with Paul's words to Timothy. Paul has in mind the continuation of things; he passes things on to Timothy, and tells him to pass them on to faithful men, able to teach others also. We see things passing on, the conflict passing on to other hands; it passes on to the hands of Othniel and he is marked by his power to capture the city of the book. I think the man who can completely overthrow in his spirit the influence of the literature of the world can be trusted with Caleb's daughter. Caleb's daughter represents, not the energy that can get victory, but the state of soul that is intensely interested in springs of water. She represents the subjective state which is the product of spiritual energy. If there is the energy of love, the spiritual state seen in Achsah will result.

The world's literature has increasingly a spiritual character in an evil scene. The books most highly esteemed in the world and which appear to be educational have a vein of positive infidelity running through them all. You cannot take up a popular encyclopædia that has not a spiritual element in it of infidelity and the setting aside of the holy Scriptures as being inspired of God. There is a terrible working of the power of evil in the literature of the world, and it is becoming increasingly so today. We could not expect to find springs of water where

people are reading habitually the literature of the world. A great deal of spiritual vitality is sapped by the kind of reading that Christians indulge in habitually. The springs of water come in when Kirjath-sepher is taken and its name changed. In Acts 19 we read they had a fine bonfire and burnt the worth in books of fifty thousand pieces of silver. When I was converted I had a bonfire and I never regretted it. It is much better to burn such books than to take them to the bookstall to poison someone else.

If we give ourselves to books which contain a description of the land we shall find quite as much entertainment as we need. We are not without books, but not books written by Canaanitish hands. We have princes in Israel who have written books; it is a fine thing to read books written by princes in Israel. Then we shall find that there are springs of water.

It is interesting to see that the city of the book becomes characterised by a divine speaking. Debir means *Speaker*, so we have something which is far superior to anything that is the product of man's mind; we have the mind of God spoken forth for the instruction of His people. What a happy exchange that is! When that gets place with us, we can begin to understand the southern land and, the more we see what a southern land we have, the more exercised we shall be about the springs of water. Achsah had a southern land, everything was most favourable, but then it required springs of water. We all understand that we have a southern land; God has acted in a most favourable way towards us. He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ." All is most favourable, but the more we enter into the favourableness of it, the more we shall feel the need of springs of water. In a natural sense, the sunnier the land is, the more need there is for springs of water; it dries up more quickly. Achsah was exercised about springs. It is a great exercise for us that we should not be content with the knowledge of the great favour of God to us objectively, but that we should

have an intense desire for springs of water.

Briefly and simply I should say that the upper springs refer to what we have in God the Father and in His Son Jesus Christ; and the lower springs refer to the comfort and refreshment which we find in the brethren. In Ephesians we have a wonderful presentation to us of God the Father, and in Colossians we have a wonderful presentation of Christ. Now the refreshment of that, the spiritual power of it in the souls of the saints, I take to be what answers to the upper springs. But then there are the lower springs; there is great comfort and refreshment to be found in the company of the brethren. John speaks about the Father and the Son, but he also speaks about the brethren. The springs speak of real refreshment, not things held merely as a doctrine. One might be perfectly sound on the New Testament doctrine of the Spirit and be dry for want of springs.

Achsah went to Caleb, to her father, here a type of God. We only get springs through prayer; knowing the doctrine of things will not give it to us. I have given addresses on the Spirit and His activities, and have gone home to say, "Give me springs of water." The springs are the activities, the flowings; it is not simply that one has the Spirit. Every saint in Christ has the Spirit, but it is another thing to have the springs, the activity of spiritual affections in the power of the Spirit. That is found in divine Persons first—the upper springs; and then in the brethren, something living and fresh. We can only enjoy the inheritance as there are springs of water.

CHAPTERS 16—19

I believe that there is a very general desire among the people of God to enjoy that which God in love has made their portion. I trust we are all animated by the desire to

honour God, by the appreciation and enjoyment of that which His love has given us at the present time. It is that which makes this book of Joshua, particularly the part which is now before us, so intensely interesting and attractive.

The Lord has been faithful in giving ministry, but the practical possession and enjoyment of the things spoken of and ministered is of the greatest importance. We have to learn how to take up the inheritance. We have a most wonderful inheritance; that which was given to Israel was but a figure of it. Paul tells the Colossians that the Father has made us competent to share the portion of the saints in light—that is the inheritance. Many of us are content with the title; we are ready to say, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. That is very blessed, but what about the present practical enjoyment of it? The present position is that many of the people of God have not taken up their inheritance; therefore it is a practical question for us how we are to take it up.

These chapters deal with the division of the inheritance by lot among the tribes of Israel. As we see in chapter 13, the portion of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh had been given to them by Moses on the east side of Jordan. In chapters 15—17 the portions of the tribes of Judah and Joseph, that is, Ephraim and the other half of Manasseh, were specifically assigned to them, God indicating at the outset that they were to have their portions as He indicated, answering to God's direct disposition in the apostles in the early chapters of the Acts. In chapters 18 and 19 the position is different, for in chapter 18 the tent of meeting was set up in Shiloh, and the distribution of the territory of the seven remaining tribes was made there by "Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun and the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel . . . at the entrance of the tent of meeting," chap. 19: 51. It is not apostolic authority, as seen in Moses or

Joshua, but the priestly element is recognised, and all the saints are brought into the matter at the entrance of the tent of meeting. The place that the priestly element has in all assembly matters is of the first importance, because after apostolic judgment ends we must depend on the priestly element. This section of the book therefore applies to the saints right through the dispensation, and governs us in our present mode of sharing the inheritance.

We have been considering that, in this book, Joshua represents, not exactly Christ personally, but the leading of Christ by the Spirit such as we see in the apostles. Now that leading would always be in the direction of our taking up the inheritance. The tent of meeting as seen in the land stands in definite relation to the inheritance, which it did not in the wilderness. In the wilderness it was the tabernacle of the testimony, but in the land it was seen, not in connection with the testimony, but with the enjoyment of the inheritance. In the wilderness the tabernacle of testimony refers to the position saints have in the world; they are there for testimony, and the whole of the twelve tribes were ordered in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. Now that is our position viewed as in the world; we are set in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. Our great business in this world is, not to be comfortable in our domestic lives or successful in business, but to be identified with the tabernacle of God's testimony. The tabernacle was set up at Shiloh, and it is an immense thing to reach such a point. The tabernacle is the place where God dwells; "They shall make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them," Exod. 25: 8.

If we have the thought of a dwelling for God, everything must be regulated and ordered and distributed according to God. It is a universal idea. The tabernacle at Shiloh was a central point for all Israel; the thought of God dwelling among His people is a universal idea. If God dwells among His people we must respect everything that is of God. When people go into a church they take their

hats off; they recognise the place they are in as the house of God, and they treat it with respect. That is a right idea, but it is applied in a material way. It is a right idea to have reverence for the place where God dwells, but He does not dwell in any building of stone or brick; He dwells in His people. We are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit—that answers to Shiloh.

There must be holy conditions. We could not connect anything unholy with the place where God dwells; no insubjection or unholiness can be there—"Holiness becomes thy house, O Jehovah, for ever," Psa. 93: 5. In the light of that we have to see the divine way in which the inheritance is taken up; there is a divine way and it cannot be taken up any other way. Everything is apportioned. There were seven tribes, giving the thought of spiritual completeness, not twelve but seven. We can take up things in a spiritual way even in the presence of all the outward ruin.

All is by lot; it is a question of divine appointment. It would affect us very much to take account of divine appointment in view of enjoying the inheritance. There is divine appointment in Numbers, each tribe set in an appointed place in relation to the tabernacle of testimony. But in the land it is not a question of testimony but of enjoyment.

The whole assembly of the children of Israel were gathered together at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting; they moved together. All is ordered in view of the enjoyment of the inheritance. We have noticed in reading these chapters that when the inheritance of the tribes is described in detail each tribe has dependent villages or hamlets, or, as the note reads, farmhouses, which brings it down to household character. We have to take account of all that spiritually to see how the inheritance is enjoyed, and the New Testament gives us the answer to it. That is, the saints are divinely set together that they may enjoy the inheritance together; first in households,

then in assemblies, and then in a more general way, and I do not think we shall enjoy the inheritance if we do not take up these divine thoughts. It must have an answer at the present time. The basis on which all assembly enjoyment rests is household enjoyment; so it begins with what is described as farmhouses, the holding of each household. If Christian households do not enjoy things together there is a defect at the foundation. The assembly according to God is made up of households; that is why in the epistles where the saints are viewed as over Jordan we have so much said about husbands, wives, parents, children, masters and servants; it is a household character of things. Where right conditions do not obtain in Christian households, the inheritance is not enjoyed.

There are some households where the Lord's interests govern, and it is not difficult to introduce the Lord's things. I went to a household lately where I was delighted to find that the father, mother, and all the children were perfectly free to speak of their spiritual exercises, and there were even young children. You cannot bring that about to suit the occasion; it is characteristic. That is the basis of things. Suppose you get a number of households like that, what beautiful material it would be for local assemblies! The work of God in Europe began with households. There was the jailor's and Lydia's. Order in God's house is dependent on the order of our own households—"If one does not know how to conduct his own house, how shall he take care of the assembly of God," 1 Tim. 3: 5.

Then we find there are cities; each tribe has a specified number of cities. The cities would answer, I think, to local assemblies. It is not accidental that the saints are set together in local assemblies; God has set them together that they might enjoy the inheritance. It is not now the testimony, as in Numbers, but it is now the inheritance. Are my relations with my brethren such that they contribute to my enjoyment of the inheritance? We cannot enjoy it without the brethren. The result of Paul's and the

other apostles' labours was that assemblies were formed in Judæa and in the Gentile world, so we read that the assemblies had rest, and Paul went about confirming the assemblies, and he speaks about the assemblies of the saints. It is divine order; we cannot create something. People think sometimes that brethren have created a new order according to their own minds; if we have, it is sure to come to nothing, but we must recognise what God has created, and God has set His people in local assemblies.

Suppose one individual in a town got light from God as to the inheritance and the way it could be enjoyed, he would begin to look out for another. He would not have to look long; he would find somebody who had the same exercises and desires, and, the moment there are two, you have the thing in principle. So the Lord says "two of you"—it brings it down to the smallest number. Two saints can walk together and enjoy the inheritance. We are apt not to attach sufficient value to the fact that we are set in local assemblies; and there are not only cities but cities grouped together in tribes. We have the thought in Scripture of the grouping of assemblies; for instance, it speaks of the assemblies of God which are in Judæa in Christ Jesus. Then there was an important letter addressed to the asemblies in Galatia; and we read about the assemblies in Macedonia. That is the idea of assemblies being grouped together. When the assemblies in Macedonia sent a contribution to the poor saints in Judæa, it was two tribes linked together in the bonds of divine love.

Saints make themselves very unhappy by moving in their own wills, and they miss the joy of the inheritance. The choice of the creature is always wrong. Lot chose; the thing for us is to accept the setting where we are. If the Lord moves us, it is different; God moved Priscilla and Aquila from Rome to Corinth. Providentially He allowed the command that all Jews were to leave Rome; God knew what He was doing when He allowed the imperial edict to

go forth. He wanted to move a brother and sister to Corinth because He intended setting up a local assembly at Corinth. Our thought in moving should be, Is it God's way to contribute to His assembly there? Is that the prime thought if I move? Is it with a view to enjoying the inheritance and contributing to the saints? The voluntary idea is not right; we find in Scripture that God sets persons in a certain position and in certain relations. The Levites had their service appointed; it was never said to a Levite, You do what you like in the tabernacle. They each had their appointed work, and all was under the ordering of Aaron or Eleazar. "The whole decision is of the Lord." Could I say, I am locally in Teignmouth by the decision of the Lord?

We need not have any question at all if God providentially moves us. The exercise comes when we move ourselves apart from His providence. If we have gone anywhere because it is the will of God, we remain there and recognise our links with the brethren as a means by which we enjoy the inheritance. That is the setting in which we enjoy the inheritance and we cannot enjoy it any other way. No movement on our part can secure to us the enjoyment of the inheritance; we must either take it up in a divine way or miss it. What are we after? It tests the whole principle on which we are. Our households, our local setting in the assembly, and our relation with neighbouring assemblies, are to be governed by the principle of God dwelling in the midst of His people, He has put us divinely together so that we might enjoy the inheritance together.

We see the saints builded together at the end of Ephesians 2; then in chapter 3 there is a parenthesis which goes on to chapter 4, where we are seen together in that beautiful spirit of meekness, lowliness, long-suffering, and forbearance; we are on that principle together. And then we find the distribution, "To each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the

Christ." What a wonderful endowment! Do we believe it? No two of us have the same grace. The inheritance is so big that it takes all the saints on earth to occupy it. "To each one of us is given grace." I may not utilise it or work it out, but the grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. In speaking of the assembly lower down in the same chapter it says, "according to the working in its measure of each one part." The inheritance is so vast that it takes all saints to occupy it and enjoy it. My exercise is that I should take up my part in the measure of the grace given, and that I am working as one of the parts. We are put together that there might be this beautiful divine working, so that the inheritance might be enjoyed.

I think that we suffer, in one sense, from the truths recovered at the Reformation being so largely individual. The church had become such a corrupt and idolatrous system that there was a recoil from that; pious persons fell back on what was individual and on the enjoyment of what was individual, and they rather lost sight of the divine setting in which they were placed with other saints, so they formed a voluntary system and set up national churches. The divine thought is that the whole body is set together, and being so we have not to set up anything or to form any organisation; we have to come into the light of what is divinely constituted and take it up in the Spirit of Christ, and then we shall have great enjoyment of the inheritance. Am I full of joy? If not, there is something obstructing my enjoyment of the inheritance.

We have to recognise divine sovereignty. From the beginning we were born of God according to His own disposition, and the place where we live is according to God's disposition. If we have been moving in the fear of God, we are put where God would have us, and the local assembly is where we enjoy our inheritance in company with the people of God. It is expressly said that Joshua divided the inheritance by lot. Each tribe had its divine allotment. These great divine thoughts are essential to our

enjoyment of the inheritance. We cannot make divine thoughts bend to our ideas. We must conform to divine thoughts and cherish them, and not expect them to conform to us. There is no assembly teaching in Romans, but it is remarkable that there are five allusions to the assembly in the last chapter, and that provides a link between Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians. Corinthians gives the assembly in the wilderness aspect, and Ephesians in the aspect of being over Jordan. When we come to the end of Romans we find a loose link hanging there like the end of a railway carriage which is going to be coupled to something else. Ephesians is the next coach: the mystery is the link. There are five specific references to the assembly at the end of the epistle, showing that all the truth of Romans is to be taken up in assembly setting. We cannot have an individual enjoyment of what is in Christ outside the assembly setting.

Another feature that comes out in the distribution of the inheritance is the irregularity of the boundary lines. According to Ezekiel in the coming day they will be long lines drawn straight across the land. There will not then be the same need for brotherly giving and taking as there is now. So we find that whilst a large portion was given to Judah, yet Simeon had in result to have his portion within the territory of Judah. That is a great test and involves a tax on Judah's love for his brother. God delights to bring that out, and He gives occasion for it in the irregularity of the boundary lines; it gives occasion for brotherly consideration and grace in one another. Unless we are on good terms with our neighbour we cannot take in the universal thought. So the borders of the land give occasion for the development of love: "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love; using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace," Eph. 4: 2, 3.

CHAPTER 20

It is interesting to see in Scripture that God not only makes known to us His mind, what is in accord with His own thoughts, but He makes provision for what is very abnormal. I suppose that comes out in the cities of refuge: nothing could be more abnormal than that Israel should slay their Messiah, and the fact that it was done unwittingly made it in one sense more sad.

Although Peter said, "by wicked hands have crucified and slain," he also said, "through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers," Acts 2: 23; 3: 17. But how dreadful that God should have to take account of the state of His people being such that they might even do such a thing unwittingly! The Lord Himself said, "they know not what they do." It was a dreadful thing to have to say, but it only serves to bring out the provision of God in view of the most abnormal state of things. We can see how this applies to Israel, and I think there is an application which is very encouraging and helpful for ourselves. That is, we can all realise that the division of the inheritance and the enjoyment of it together cannot be taken up normally today. Normally every Christian household would be right, the whole company of saints in each city would form one local assembly. We must be prepared to take things up in a way suitable to God, and suitable to abnormal conditions.

The man who killed his neighbour, even unwittingly, forfeited all title to live in the inheritance. He would be exposed to the activities of the avenger of blood; he would have lost what might be called the normal enjoyment of the inheritance. Have we not lost it? A great many things have been done, and in many cases done unwittingly, but they have brought about a state of things in which the normal enjoyment of the inheritance cannot be had. So, if

things are to be taken up, they will have to be taken up in an abnormal way. The cities of refuge are abnormal.

When Israel killed their Messiah they forfeited all title to divine promises and blessing. Peter in Acts 2 and 3 presses that home to them, and Paul in speaking to the Jews at Antioch says the same; but both Peter and Paul open up cities of refuge for them, and show that, though the most abnormal thing possible has taken place, yet God has His own thought in reserve and has opened up a city of refuge. What could be more abnormal than that the Messiah, who came with His hands full of blessings for His people Israel, should be crucified and slain, and that it should be done unwittingly! Yet Peter and Paul show that the choicest blessings of the covenant and inheritance are still available. Peter dwells on the gift of the Spirit in Acts 2, and Paul refers to their having judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. The choicest blessings of the Spirit and eternal life could all be enjoyed on the principle of the city of refuge; everyone could get these things as refugees.

In Acts 2 they say, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They owned that they had done a dreadful deed; but they had done it unwittingly and were prepared to enter the city of refuge. Peter was at the gate to gather them in, and the elders were gathered together in the city. The epistle to the Hebrews shows what can be enjoyed by those who have fled for refuge; they are the people who obtain the inheritance, who get the enjoyment of all the unchangeable purposes of God; but it is enjoyment on the principle of the city of refuge. I believe, if we are to enjoy the inheritance, we must be prepared to enjoy it on that principle.

The slaying of the Lord Jesus is peculiarly the sin of the Jews, but the sin of the Christian profession corresponds to it. The sin of the Christian profession is the setting aside of the Spirit. I think that answers in the Christian profession to the slaying of the Messiah. Everything was

bound up in the Messiah for Israel; if they killed the Messiah they cut themselves off from everything. For us everything lies vitally in the Holy Spirit, and if we set aside the Holy Spirit we set aside all the true power of Christian blessing: that is the sin of Christendom. The Holy Spirit is dishonoured and displaced; it is done unwittingly, but nevertheless the consequences are tremendous. It is a wonderful testimony to the heart of God that He does take account of things done unwittingly. I believe that God looks down on the state of the Christian profession, and He sees that the enjoyment of the inheritance has been forfeited through the dishonour done to the Holy Spirit and the setting aside of Him practically. God in His wondrous grace and forbearance takes account of that as done unwittingly. His people do not know what they are doing. So the principle of the city of refuge comes in for us now; we have to be content to enjoy the inheritance in conditions of strict limitations.

It is written in Numbers 35: 26: "If the manslayer shall in any way come outside the limits of the city of his refuge whither he hath fled, and the avenger of blood find him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kill the manslayer, there shall be no blood-guiltiness upon him; for the manslayer should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest." I suppose the death of the high priest refers to the fact that the present priestly position of the Lord Jesus will not continue for ever. He is in a priestly place at the right hand of God, but then there will be a change. The dispensation will change altogether, and, when Christ is a Priest on His throne according to Zechariah 6, Israel will no longer be restricted: we shall be under no limitations, but we shall go back to the heavenly inheritance without restrictions. This dispensation will have ceased. The principle of the city of refuge is provisional; it holds sway for a certain length of time, and it imposes strict limitations.

I think that 2 Timothy gives us the principle of the city

of refuge, because the state of the Christian profession has become such as is described there. Men are lovers of their own selves, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. They are going on with many things quite inconsistent with the enjoyment of the inheritance; that is the state of the public Christian profession. Paul says, "In the last days difficult times shall come." How can people like that enjoy the inheritance? The question is, Do we want to enjoy it? If we do, we must be content to flee into the city of refuge.

The moment the church is seen as fallen, as it is at Ephesus, there is the call to repent. They might have fallen into that state unwittingly, but they did not remain in it unwittingly after the Lord called attention to it. That is the solemn thing. If the Lord calls attention to something which is contrary to His mind, it is not unwitting after that; it becomes deliberate. The position of things to-day is analogous to the position of Israel. When God by His servants called attention to what had been done, it was no longer a question of "unwittingly"; divine light had been shed on the position and the people who had heard the preaching were at once divided into two classes. There were those who repented and availed themselves of the cities of refuge, and there were those who, so to speak, endorsed what had been done and went on with it. They went on until they came under the hands of the avenger of blood; and that is what the Christian profession is going on to. It is going on to a most certain and appalling judgment. It is a solemn thing to go back and deliberately do a thing after God has called attention to it. There was a possibility of the Hebrews, who had fled for refuge, going back and putting themselves deliberately under the guilt of what God had taken account of as done unwittingly—crucifying the Son of God.

The cities of refuge were all levitical cities, which is very suggestive; they would be marked by the ministry of the word, which answers to the apostles' teaching. God has

raised up in these last days a wonderful ministry of the word, and the city of refuge is characterised by a spiritual ministry in contrast with the defective and erroneous ideas all around. There is spiritual light and instruction. Every city of refuge was full of Levites. Paul called attention to his doctrine; and the things that Timothy had learned from him were to be committed to faithful men. He called attention to the Holy Scriptures, and gave great place to ministry and divine instruction. That is what gives character to the city of refuge. Christians generally had left the city of refuge; all in Asia had turned away. They had departed from what was levitical and priestly, for all that was levitical and priestly was personified in Paul. Paul in 2 Timothy lays down the constitution of the city of refuge; there is to be a judgment of all contrary to the mind of God and separation from it, and walking with the saints on a certain restricted basis.

The limitations should not be felt as a deprivation, but as a privilege. What a wonderful thing to be kept in a sphere where we do not have the intrusion of all kinds of evil! I look out on beloved Christians in the profession. They are exposed to every kind of evil, and they know it and they groan under it, but they have no locks or bars to keep it out. What a terrible position to be in! Every year you find some fresh inroad of error. Why? Because there are no walls to the city; it is a kind of open place and anything can come in.

In a city of refuge a man got what was universal in a peculiar way; he had it in connection with what was levitical and priestly. The Levites and priests built the cities of refuge, and they had a universal outlook; the Levites were for all Israel and the priests were for all Israel. We get the enjoyment of what is universal, not by actual contact with our brethren, but in the light of spiritual and priestly ministry. How could we touch it any other way? I do not think the Levites or the priests ever give us a limited outlook. The Levites serve in all Israel, and every priest has

a universal interest in the people of God. Now we can take it all up, but in a restricted way. We do not, alas, come in contact with our brethren universally; the conditions are such that it is impossible to do so. That is why it is impossible to enjoy the inheritance normally to-day, but it can be enjoyed in a restricted way in the city of refuge. Those there had the best of it; they had the fruit of the land without doing a hand's turn for it. They lived on the tithes; the best the land produced was carried into those cities. So, while there was restriction in being confined to the city, yet it was full of the whole wealth of the land; there were no restrictions on enjoyment. A manslayer was better off than anyone else. In Malachi the windows of heaven were opened and they are opened to-day, and God is sending down a blessing so great that there is not room to receive it. That is the great trouble to-day. People want more bessing, but I feel I want more expansion.

I think that the whole wealth of the inheritance is being ministered bountifully at the present time by the Lord's servants who are in the secret of His mind. How could anyone feel that he was shut up spiritually? We are outwardly restricted, but inwardly we can expand in the full wealth of the inheritance. We can enjoy ministry and participate in what is priestly, and realise our links with the saints universally, but realise it in a spiritual way and accept the outward restrictions. That is the principle of the city of refuge.

The elders represent the responsible element in the city of refuge. They look out for anyone seeking admission. The elders take him in, or "gather" him. They hear what he has to say and find out whether what has happened has been done unwittingly. He has been involved in many things contrary to God, and now he realises it. That is exactly the exercise that many Christians have had during the last hundred years; they have realised that they have been identified with what is contrary to God's mind. It has been brought to their knowledge through the grace

of God, through the ministry of the word. What they have done was done unwittingly, but now they know it and they want to avail themselves of the provision.

A man who felt that the avenger of blood was on his track would put as much pace on as he could. We ought to feel more seriously than we do the state of the Christian profession. We do not feel half seriously enough how the Spirit is displaced and the divine order set aside, and all kinds of things carried on that are contrary to the whole nature of the dispensation and would hinder the inheritance being enjoyed, and expose the people of God to every kind of danger and injury. If we felt it more, we should be more energetic to reach the city of refuge and to stop there.

The assembly is responsible to make a difference between what is unwittingly done and what is wittingly done. We come across believers who are going on with the light they have; they do many things for want of light; God has never brought to them the light of things. We regard these persons with a compassionate interest and affection; our hearts go out to them wherever we come across them, and we are thankful for the little light they have. But if we bring light to that person and show them the true mind of God—the headship of Christ and the presence of the Spirit and the constitution of the assembly—and they resent it and deliberately turn it down, they are in quite a different position. That is why it is so serious to bring people light. The Christian profession at the present time as a whole is guilty of having turned from the light that God has given them; a tremendous inroad of darkness and evil is coming in as a divine judgment on those who have deliberately refused the light. It is a very solemn position.

CHAPTER 21

We come in this chapter to the climax of the book. The Levites had their definite place in all Israel, which I take to be the crowning feature in the book. Eleazar is mentioned before Joshua here, suggesting that the priestly element has the most prominent place in the allotment of the land, and in securing what is for the pleasure of God. The bringing in of the priest would indicate that the thing is looked at from the standpoint of the pleasure of God—not merely that the people get a good portion, but that there is a ministering to God. It is said of the priest, "He shall minister to me in the priest's office." Securing God's portion is greater than the inheritance, and that is suggested in this chapter. The inheritance having been divided, and the cities of refuge introduced as a gracious provision, now we come to what I consider to be the climax of the book. The priest secures things for God. The priests and Levites represent what is for God; the inheritance is for man. The inheritance is not an end in itself, but a means to an end; all the blessing and wealth which God bestows on His people, immense as it is, is not God's end, but a means to an end.

The end is that God should have His place in the midst of His people. These forty-eight cities for the Levites were distributed among all the tribes. The Levites represented what was for God; that is why they were so carefully excluded from participating in the inheritance. Almost every scripture that refers to the Levites calls attention carefully and specifically to the fact that the Levite has no part in the inheritance; he represents another idea greater than the inheritance, and the inheritance is a means to reach it. The Levites represent what is for God; we see that at the beginning. God said, Sanctify to me the first-born. Every first-born is hallowed; that is the basis of the levitical idea. Afterwards God took the tribe of Levi

in place of all the first-born; they were hallowed or sanctified to Him. The Levites and their cities represent God's portion, but the inheritance is our portion.

The Levites represented first-born sons and the assembly of the first-born ones enregistered in heaven, but the great thought here is that the pleasure of God in a priestly way is secured. There is a close link between priesthood and sonship. In Ephesians we read of "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," Eph. 1: 18. God has His portion, His inheritance. For God to enjoy what is due to Him must be greater than for me to enjoy God's gifts. If I enjoy what His love has given, that is very blessed; nothing could be more blessed for the creature; but is it to stop there? If it does, the creature is to be everything and God nothing; and that would not do.

When the tent of meeting is set up at Shiloh, there is a divine gathering centre where all the tribes come, and in connection with that the inheritance is apportioned. The levitical cities are seen in connection with the divine gathering centre. I believe that in the last hundred years the Lord has given His people to come in some measure to the divine gathering centre, and the result of the movement of separation from human ordinances to the divine gathering centre has been that there has been light as to the inheritance and as to the principles of God's ways, and light as to what is due to God and His holy service. That is connected with the Levites; they are altogether set apart for the service of God. Christ is the true Shiloh—Shiloh means *He whose right it is.* As He has His right place as the true gathering centre, everything falls into its divinely appointed place in the inheritance—the cities of refuge, and the Levites. Everything falls into its appointed place if we know what it is to come to Shiloh.

The cities of the Levites were distributed in Israel; in every tribe there was a levitical city. They were within reach of every Israelite. God kept before the people that there was something greater than the inheritance; if we

kept that before us it would have a profound effect on us. We are so self-centred even as to our own blessings. When I was a young Christian and first began going through the villages trying to speak to people, one of the first things I noticed was that people were very interested if one spoke to them about what was for them, but they were not interested if one spoke ever so feebly about what was for God. The moment you give the Levite a place, they are not interested. The Levites were entirely separated to be for God; God was their portion. If we look at the references to Levites in this book we shall find it very interesting—see chapter 13: 33; 14: 3; 18: 7. God is calling attention in the reference to the Levites to the fact that they had something better than the inheritance. The One who gave the inheritance is greater than the inheritance, and the offerings by fire were His own peculiar portion. The priesthood was what God had, and God points out that what was for Him was greater than what was for man.

The sons of Aaron had thirteen cities and the rest of the Kohathites had only ten. The Levites had two great offices, as we see in Deuteronomy 33: 8: "Thy Thummim and thy Urim are for thy godly one, whom thou didst prove at Massah . . . They shall teach Jacob thine ordinances, and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thy nostrils, and whole burnt-offerings upon thine altar." That was the place of the Levites; they were to teach and to offer. The last three verses of the chapter are brought in after the allocation of the cities of the Levites.

Not a single thing had failed, every enemy was laid low, and every thought of God was fulfilled. If we give what is due to God in connection with His service, we shall find there will not be a single thing lacking on our side. We shall get the full satisfaction of every spiritual desire if we give God His whole portion. The Levite was a man who had God before him, and who considered for God: if he taught the people God's law and convenant, and if he

offered sacrifices unto God, he was thinking of the pleasure of God—that is the crown of everything. We are never so happy, our cup never so full and running over, as when in some measure we are able to minister to God. The great tendency is to put the levitical thought out of its place and make it consist in ministering to man: I do not think that is the thought at all. The pleasure of God is to be secured in His people by instruction; there is the instruction side of the levitical service, "They shall teach thy law," and there is the sacrificial side, but both have in view the pleasure of God.

Abraham had to recognise that there was something greater than the land, because he gave tithes to Melchisedec—see Hebrews 7. The great vessel of promise, the one to whom God had sworn that He would give the land, had to recognise that there was something greater than the inheritance; he found himself in the presence of the priest of the most High God, and he gave him tithes of all he had. The service of God was greater to Abraham than the inheritance, and it ought to be to all of us. Why do we come to the prayer meeting? Is it to get a little comfort after a trying time? We can get it, but is that all? No, we come to serve God in a priestly way in connection with His interests and glory and all that is due to Him. Then in coming together to eat the Lord's supper we do not lose sight of our side; it is a most precious ministry to us of the love of Christ. The Lord Himself calls attention to it—"This is my body which is for you," that is our side. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you"—that is our side. But if we really take it up, it would qualify us to minister to Him. We should think of the profound joy that is found in ministering to the Lord and in carrying on His service. We can go up to Jerusalem, to what is universal. We leave what is local and connected with time, and go up to minister there to the pleasure of God. See the great place God has in Ephesians; we should all read and study that epistle in

connection with our present subject. In chapter 2 we have the saints in all the full enjoyment and blessedness of the inheritance, but what is the end in view? If we read the epistle carefully, we notice the immense place that God has in it. The whole drift of the epistle to the Ephesians is intended to work out to the end that there should be glory to God in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. God is to have His portion, and that is involved in this levitical chapter; so it is the crown and climax of the book.

It is good to realise what we mean when we sing, "Eternity's begun." When saints come together in assembly it is a great thing for them to realise, if only for two minutes, that eternity has begun: a character of things has come about, even here and now, that is properly eternal in its character. God is getting what is due to Him and what will be His satisfaction and joy throughout eternity.

We begin by thinking of Christ in relation to ourselves, but the turning point in our spiritual history is when we begin to think of Him in relation to the pleasure of God. When you kneel down in private you feel you have something that sets aside all your little anxieties, worries, and cares, and you can speak to God of His delight in Christ. I wonder if we do. We pray about all kinds of things connected with ourselves, our spiritual exercises, our soul needs, what we would like to feel. That is not ministering to the pleasure of God. If you can speak to Him of Christ, His delight in His beloved Son, you have the Levite and have given him his city. We are full of infirmity and we find ourselves pressed and pre-occupied with a thousand things; the least little thing distracts us. We go and pray; one thing after another comes into our minds and we do not get to God; but the Priest is for all that weakness. If I am distracted with a thousand things, I need the Priest, and He is able to set me free—I have proved that He can. I have gone to God with many burdens, and in half an hour I have been ashamed that they ever were burdens.

We need to get over to the levitical side: the Levite thinks of what is due to God, and he looks at the people of God in relation to the pleasure of God. Paul preached the gospel in a levitical and priestly way: "carrying on as a sacrificial service the message of glad tidings of God, in order that the offering up of the nations might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit," Rom. 15: 16. Paul wanted something for God. I am to go out to tell poor sinners how good God is, but I am to do it all with a view to God getting something. I am carrying out a sacrificial service. Paul was a true Levite. I heard once of a young man who was brought into fellowship through hearing a young man preach in the street. He went home and said to his wife, 'We often preach in the street, but we consider for man, but that young man I heard preach considered for God.' That brought him out from what he was in and brought him into fellowship. He found a levitical city.

The thought of rest is introduced in three connections in this book. First in connection with the enemies being all destroyed so that the land had rest from war; and secondly in connection with the allotment of the inheritance—the people of God get their assigned portions. Then thirdly at the end of chapter 21 it is introduced in connection with the Levites having their portion; so the complete thought of God is reached. Not only are the enemies destroyed, and the inheritance possessed, but provision is made, as a result of that, so that the pleasure of God is served. Priestly and levitical service become universally characteristic of Israel. The complete thought of God is secured; the climax of the book is reached.

CHAPTER 22

In this chapter we find that there are certain tribes who are content to drop down to a lower ground than that

which was the thought of God. They could be spoken of as faithful to the words spoken through Moses, and they could not be charged with any sin. They are blessed by Joshua, but notwithstanding they are prepared to take up a lower ground than the thought of God for His people; it was not all that Jehovah had said for His people. It is not that they have not received something from God. They have a great deal, a divinely assigned portion; but the question for us is, Have we all that God in love has given? Have we entered into the inheritance according to God's thought?

God can only be pleased and properly served according to His own thoughts. We might be prepared to fight for the inheritance and yet be content not to live there. That was so with these tribes; they were ready to fight for it, but they did not care to live in it. If some conflict arose about the truth, and the heavenly calling and portion of the saints, some of us might be prepared to go to war about it, but the question is, Do we want to live there? Many have been valiant in contesting about things that they have never enjoyed. These two tribes were willing to fight for a place in which they had no desire to dwell. When the enemies had been defeated and the land possessed, they were quite content to go back to the east side of Jordan and live there.

The nine and a half tribes were conscious they were on true ground; to put it in our language, they were on true assembly ground. They said, "thus saith the whole assembly of Jehovah" and "the land of the possession of Jehovah, where Jehovah's tabernacle dwelleth." They were standing on true assembly ground and they knew it quite well. They showed a beautiful brotherly spirit; they said, "If your possession is unclean, come over into the land of the possession of Jehovah." But the fact was that the tribes took lower ground in going back to the east side of Jordan, and God permitted it. He does allow His people to take up what answers to it. He says, so to speak, If you

do not want my land, if you are thinking of yourselves and your cattle, and what suits you, you can have it. God does not deal arbitrarily with His people; if we are content with a small measure we can have it.

It appears that these tribes were not altogether comfortable. They had a distinct feeling that they were taking up ground different from what their brethren stood on. Something was needed to keep up the link with the inheritance, so an artificial and human expedient was tried which proved ineffectual. They departed out of the land of Canaan and left Shiloh, the true gathering centre, where the tabernacle was in the land of Canaan; they left all that. It was not that they ceased to be the people of God, or to have the blessing of God, but they went away from everything that was most precious. To my mind it answers to what Paul said to Timothy, "Thou knowest this, that all who are in Asia . . . have turned away from me," 2 Tim. 1: 15.

The nine and a half tribes show a lovely spirit. They say, If your inheritance is unclean, if you are not at rest, come back. They had no hesitation as to the right ground, but they say to the others, 'If you are uncomfortable, come over, but do not let us have a sectional movement, or set up a rival centre of worship. We cannot admit of anything like that; it must be war if you are going to have a sectional movement; we cannot tolerate that; the whole assembly stands for that.' It shows the kind of spirit that would animate those who live in the inheritance. They would like all the brethren to come over; they are not exclusive in that sense.

As a matter of fact the motives of the two and a half tribes were good; there might be that and yet lower ground taken than the calling of God would allow. They set up an altar of grand appearance. They betrayed an uneasy feeling that they were breaking the link, and therefore some human expedient had to be adopted to keep it up. All Christians would admit that it was wrong

for Christians to be divided: so they have human expedients. They form evangelical alliances—that is a beautiful altar to look at, but it is a human expedient.

What they said was true: "Your children will say to our children, What have ye to do with Jehovah the God of Israel? Jehovah hath made the Jordan a border between us and you." If we live on the wrong side we shall want a grand altar to remind us that we are linked with the children of God who enjoy the inheritance. If we dwell on the responsible side we shall miss what is most pleasurable to God. There is a land of which He says, It is the glory of all lands; His eyes and His heart are there perpetually. That is never said of the land on the east side of Jordan. The west side is what His love delights in. Do we love God enough to be able to say truly that nothing will satisfy us to receive but what satisfies God to give? That is the whole thing. What does the love of God give? If I get some apprehension of what the love of God may give, nothing less will do for me.

I suppose that those who forsook Paul went on with assembly order, they broke bread every first day of the week, and they observed all the instructions. The epistle to the Ephesian assembly in Revelation 2 shows where they had reached. They were exceedingly jealous for God's name and divine principles; they did not tolerate any kind of evil, but the Lord says, You have left your first love; you have fallen; repent, and do the first works. They were all breaking bread and maintaining what was right, but they had slipped away in their affections. Paul had said that all in Asia had turned away from him; but John throws further light on it. He shows the condition of these assemblies; it was not that they were not believers or not blessed of God, but they had dropped down to a lower plane; they were not going on to the highest thoughts of God. The two and a half tribes moved on that line. They chose their inheritance on the east side, and God acquiesced and allowed them to have their

inheritance on that side, but that did not make the east side of Jordan the proper side to live on.

The altar of grand appearance is a poor substitute for the tabernacle of Jehovah. The tabernacle was the point of unity. The enjoyment of the inheritance together constitutes real unity. If people go out of fellowship, they have not been enjoying the inheritance with their brethren, so they come to think that there is something better elsewhere. The altar was intended to be a witness that Jehovah was God, but then it was a witness all the time to them that they were not dwelling where Jehovah's tabernacle was. The idea was not to set up another centre of worship; they disclaimed that and were able to clear themselves before their brethren of rebellion or independence; they did not want to set up another centre. The unity is connected with the place where God dwells—that is the great point in Ephesians 2, where we have one new man and one body, and access to the Father by one Spirit. These are spiritual thoughts that are only realities on the west side of Jordan, and then we can have the saints builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. There is real power for unity in that. It is not that people profess certain principles, but they are in the vitality of things. It is a vital fellowship, not simply principles, or that we all break bread together. I do not care for outward fellowship if inward fellowship is not there. Right principles are like the walls of a house—there is no comfort in a house if there are no walls. They keep out the wind and the weather, but walls are not the comfort of the house. That lies in the furniture and the family affections we have there; the home is there. Divine principles are all external; they safeguard the affections, but the real bond of unity is the enjoyment together of things connected with the affections. If we are not set for that, the outward fellowship is not worth much. If you have only principles, you have only walls; they are important because they protect all that is inside; but, if there is nothing inside, what

is the good? It is an empty shell. The principles of fellowship are but walls; they are preservative. What is there to be preserved? We shall never have unity in any spiritual sense apart from enjoyment of the inheritance. I wish we could give our brethren the impression that we are having the finest times conceivable and that we want them all with us. They look at the walls and do not know what is inside. Would not any lover of God want to be in a spot where God dwells, where saints are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit?

It is beautiful to find that this was felt throughout all Israel to be an assembly matter; it could not be tolerated in the assembly that there should be an independent or sectional movement; it must be put down with a firm hand. No other gathering centre could be tolerated. They have assembly exercise; they say, "Thus saith the whole assembly," and, again, "Jehovah will be wroth with the whole assembly of Israel." They quote the example of a man who had trespassed and wrath came on all the assembly; they take it up in the light of the assembly, of what was due to God. But they listen to the explanation of the two and a half tribes and bring word again to their brethren. "The children of Israel blessed God and no more said that they would go up in warfare against them."

Phinehas was a man who knew how to use a javelin; no one can use a javelin better than a priest. They made a good selection when they chose Phinehas to be head of the deputation. Then they chose princes, heads of families, the priestly estimate of what was due to God. These men were prepared to exterminate Reuben and Gad, not because they did not love them, but because they loved Jehovah and considered for Him and for His people—everything must be sacrificed to that. Phinehas had showed what he was made of; when the enemy had sought to corrupt Israel he executed summary judgment—"He was jealous with my jealousy"—so Jehovah made with him a covenant of everlasting priesthood.

The heads of houses represented the whole assembly in its responsibility to preserve unflinchingly and uncompromisingly what was due to Jehovah; the whole assembly was there to maintain that. We want priest and princes; otherwise things are let go. These men did not say, It does not matter; there was no looseness there.

The two and a half tribes had not the tabernacle of Jehovah; it is a great test whether there is the presence of God with His people. I heard of a man who was a prominent preacher and went out of fellowship, and he said, after going about and trying the best of the religious world, There is no worship anywhere else. That is solemn. If there is only worship in one place one would like to be in that place. Shiloh is the place.

The two and a half tribes wanted a link with God's people. It shows that inward intuitions are often right when one's course is wrong. Their inward intuition was right; they felt they were on different ground from their brethren, and they felt they must have some expedient to keep up the link; they were in a wrong position. Ultimately they were the first to go into idolatry and captivity. We have to judge things by their final issue.

CHAPTER 23

This chapter would answer almost exactly to Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. Paul is our Joshua; he was the faithful leader by the Spirit of the people of God into the inheritance. As long as Paul lived things were preserved; there was no defection in Paul or in any of the apostles. It was not that they did not make blunders, but there was no defection; they were kept in the Father's name, kept in the unity of the testimony. They led the people into the inheritance, particularly Paul.

The point is reached here when Joshua is stricken in years. The time has come for him to depart, and things have to be transferred now from the spiritual power and energy in Joshua into the responsibility of all Israel. That is very much like Acts 20. Paul sent for the Ephesian elders and recounted to them the nature of his ministry, and not only the ministry in itself, but his own personal character as the minister; he brings all before them and then he speaks of his departure. The time had come for him to go, the spiritual vessel of uncorrupted truth has to go, and he transfers things into the responsibility of the elders of Ephesus, representing the responsible element in the assembly. Things pass out of the hands of the apostles into the hands of the saints generally.

Elements of departure are always in the human heart, and they appeared very quickly in the history of the church. Even before the apostles went, elements of departure were manifest upon all hands. It has pleased God that things should pass into the hands of His people as responsible; they passed out of the hands of the apostles into the hands of the church in responsibility. Now the question is, Has the church been faithful to the deposit? Has she maintained the grounds of the inheritance?

Paul referred to his ministry in the various features of it, but the final touch he gives is, "I have not shrunk from announcing to you the whole counsel of God." It was given to Paul as a special vessel of ministry to bring out the whole counsel of God—that would cover the inheritance. Paul was privileged to be the vessel of everything that God purposed in love to give His people; he brought it all out. All he has unfolded in the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, all that is connected with resurrection, being risen with Christ, being raised up together and seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus—that is the inheritance, all that is in the love of God and in the mind of God to bestow on His people. As far as Israel was concerned, the land was in the purpose of God

for them, and Joshua tells them that everything spoken by God had been brought to pass; nothing had failed. That answers very much to the epistle to the Ephesians. If we read Ephesians we shall see that nothing has failed that God has brought to pass in the purpose of His love. But then we should always read Ephesians alongside of Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, where he recalls to them the blessedness and perfection of the ministry, but he warns them of the possibility of defection—"after my departure." It is a solemn warning.

In this chapter Joshua is recounting to the people all that God had done. If one could chase a thousand, it was because God had done it. If they overcame all their enemies, it was because God had fought for them. Everything that had been done, God had done. We have to take account of that as one of the great divine facts. Whatever is spiritually wrought, God is the doer of it. If Joshua goes, or Paul goes, God does not go. When Paul is going to depart he says, "I commend you to *God* and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all the sanctified."

We have always to keep these things before us: the completion of everything on God's side, but then the solemn possibility of our missing it all. If I do not see the perfection of everything on God's side in Christ, I shall not be established in grace; if I do not see the possibility of departure, I shall get careless in responsibility. We want the two things rightly balanced in our souls if we are to be preserved. The character of a minister must correspond entirely with his ministry if things are to be maintained. Paul says, 'Remember my labour, my ministry, the self-denying character of my service, and my tears, keep all that before you?' Why? Because it is a model of the spirit in which alone the inheritance can be held. We see the extraordinary power of God in Paul. It is wonderful that God preserved a man like Paul in moral suitability to the inheritance right to the end. It shows

what God can do; it was God who did it. Paul says, "I commend you to God." It is the same God. It is a great encouragement to us; whatever was true in Paul was true in him by the power of God, and you and I have the same God and the same power. If Paul was about to depart, Paul's God would not depart, and Paul says, "I commend you to *God*." That is the only way that things are going to be maintained now; they are maintained by the power of the living God. So there is only one thing we need be afraid of, "lest there be in any one of you a wicked heart of unbelief in turning away from the living God," Heb. 3: 12.

The word of God's grace is the testimony of all that God is in grace; it would cover the whole truth of the revelation. God is speaking, not in the way of making demands, but in order to give expression to the immensity of His own grace. Is not that exactly the character of the covenant? The covenant for us lies in the cup of which we drink. The word of the Lord is, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." That is the covenant, it is the presentation to our hearts of all the blessed God is in His love, coming out to us through the death of Christ to bless us infinitely according to His own heart. We are apt to overlook the immense importance of a people being secured through the covenant to love God. I do not know that in the New Testament, in the teaching of the epistles, there is any command to love God, but it is distinctly stated that there are certain persons that love God. In a sense it is a characteristic designation of the saints that they love God.

Now we come to just two sets of influences: that is the influence of the love of God known in the bond of the covenant by His people; and then another set of influences represented by the nations of Canaan, the effect of which would be to entirely counteract the divine influence. We are tested by the kind of influences we allow our spirits to come under. Joshua says, in verse 7, "that

ye enter not among these nations, that remain among you," and in verse 12 we find a cleaving to the residue of these nations and making marriages with them—there is progression in it. Spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies operates through persons, and therefore it is of the greatest importance that we should perceive our associations. Evil principles are not like things that float about in the air; they are moral influences that operate through persons, and very nice persons too. Joshua speaks about cleaving to them and making marriages with them; it suggests that these nations were rather attractive persons that we might not only cleave to but form relationships with. It is the nice people that we have to beware of. They were idolaters. There may be very nice people who are governed by what is natural, and not by God and by what is spiritual; and if we keep company with persons of that kind the subtle influence of what governs them will insidiously and unconsciously operate on us all the time. That is the serious thing of associations with those who as to their governing principles are of the world and not of God. Their gods are not to be mentioned or bowed down to. If we never mentioned them we should not bow down to them. We are apt to forget the power of evil, which as regards Christians operates chiefly, not through drunkards, thieves, corrupt immoral persons, but through nice people who are not at all governed by what is spiritual. Their thoughts, feelings, sensibilities and affections are governed by the natural, and all the time we spend with such people we come unconsciously under the influence of that kind of thing. It is impossible to maintain love to God under those conditions.

"The residue" suggests that the ground is not cleared. Canaan was never secure from hostile powers until the days of Solomon. In Solomon's day there was no adversary occurrent, but we do not find that in Joshua, and the land to-day is not secure from hostile powers; they have to be resisted. We shall never enjoy the inheritance unless

we learn to resist the hostile powers, and they chiefly operate through nice people whom we might cleave to and make marriages with. If such are not judged, the affections of the saints get corrupted. There are many such, professing Christians too, who are not governed by the Spirit. They are in the same land; they have their place in the sphere of divine blessing. Paul says, "Of your own selves shall men arise." Think of that! A man who was made overseer by the Holy Spirit of God may become the source of corrupt influence and speak perverse things, drawing disciples after him. That shows the subtle character of it. Nothing will do for us but to be set in our affections for what is of God, for what is spiritual, and to keep ourselves most carefully from associations with persons who are governed by other principles. However attractive they may be naturally, they can never help us in relation to God; they can only become, as this chapter says, a snare and a trap, and ultimately they will become a scourge and thorns in our eyes.

We must be careful also of their books. Books emanate from persons; a book is an extended influence of a person. When I read a book I put myself under the influence of the person who wrote it. What is his mind? What governs him? If he is spiritual, he loves God, and the Lord Jesus Christ is supreme with him; if he is walking in the Spirit, that man will help me. But if he is a man of the world, if he is a vessel of influences that are not of God, however attractive he may be, however nice his book may be, it will only be a trap and a snare to me. The nicer the book is, the more a trap it is.

There is nothing more encouraging to me than that the divine proposal is to love God with my whole mind and heart. J.N.D. said he thought he could say that he loved God with his whole heart, but he was not sure that he could say he loved Him with his whole mind. I know J.N.D. was a long way beyond me, but I am encouraged by the divine proposal that we are to love God with all our

hearts and all our souls, all our minds and all our strength. That is the divine proposal, and God does not propose an impossibility which cannot come to pass. It is not possible to human nature, but God has given His Holy Spirit in order that what is impossible might become possible. I believe that if I loved God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength I should be as supremely happy now as I shall be in heaven; it is the supreme happiness of the creature. We think that God is demanding what we cannot give, but He is proposing the necessities of His own love; He is proposing a thought of supreme blessedness. Is it possible? Of course it is, if the Holy Spirit has come into the heart of the saints and is allowed to have His way, and to form those divine affections which have their spring and object in God. It is a possibility. Some said that John 4 was a splendid impossibility, but J.B.S. said it was a splendid possibility.

These last two chapters of Joshua come in as a very solemn test to us. It is all very well to read about the enemies being all overthrown and the land possessed, but we have to face the test of it. Is it true? Are we living in the inheritance and enjoying it, loving God and enjoying all that His love gives, or have we some link with the nations, some underground passage which keeps up the connection with the influences of the world that are all contrary to God?

Joshua represents the spiritual leadership of Christ among His people. He does not represent Christ personally but the spiritual leading of Christ, such as is seen in Paul. We find Paul going straight on to the end; all he wanted was to finish his course, though bonds and imprisonment awaited him. It was not an easy path, but he wanted to finish his course. Six years later he wrote in 2 Timothy, "I have finished my course." He had done all he wanted to do; he went straight through and was never diverted from the inheritance. We could not say that Paul did not give us a proper lead into the inheritance, but he

has gone now and the question is, What are we to do? We have the privilege of considering the ministry, service and character of Paul, and that is the kind of person who gets the inheritance and enjoys it, and stands fast in it. Are we to follow Paul so that we may enjoy the inheritance, or are we to come under the influence of the nations? In principle there are only two things; it is either Paul or the nations.

It is touching that Paul should speak to the Ephesian elders about "the assembly of God which he has purchased with the blood of his own." Think what it was to God to have you and me. He was prepared to pay that price; He purchased us with the blood of His own, and it is a matter of righteousness that He should have the affections of His people. He is always seeking their affections through the Supper. People say, I break bread because the Lord desired me to do it. Is that all? Are you not going deeper than that? There is a great deal more in it. Why did He desire it? What was His object? He thought of the effect of it on our spirits, the effect of His own love, so that that love might be impressed more deeply every first day of the week in indelible characters on our affections, so that we might love the Lord Jesus Christ and God, and thus enjoy the inheritance.

CHAPTER 24

It is very striking how Jehovah in making this appeal through Joshua recounts all His former ways and all that He had done for His people, and He brings it to bear in a most touching way as a last appeal for faithfulness and devotion in service to Him. I would suggest that we have in the verses read from Joshua 24 what precisely answers in a typical way to the ministry of Paul.

In this chapter Jehovah goes back to the beginning of

His ways: "Your fathers dwelt of old on the other side of the river, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river, and led him throughout the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed and gave him Isaac." God reminds His people that there had been a time when they were altogether beyond the pale. Euphrates was the boundary, the limit of that sphere which was in the thought of God for man's blessing, and He says: "Your fathers dwelt of old on the other side of the river . . . and served other gods." I suppose what would answer to our being brought from the other side of the river is what the apostle speaks of as repentance towards God, and along with repentance there is faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. So, if God took Abraham from the other side of the river and from other gods, He gave him Isaac. He gave him one in whom the covenant was established, in whom all nations should bless themselves. That is, He typically gave him the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is an immense thing to have that great blessing of which Paul testifies—repentance towards God. The real thought of repentance is not merely that a man feels he has done wrong but that he has lost his link with God. One doubts if there is any genuine repentance until there is a desire to know the living God. Paul said to the people of Lystra, We want you to turn from vanities to the living God. Paul speaks to the Thessalonians of the word of the report of God. The gospel brings report of what God is to man, and the first effect of that being received is repentance towards God; that is the judgment of everything that is on the other side of the river. All the other gods there are judged, because, if man has not the true God, he has other gods—man must venerate something.

Serving other gods was not the original state of man as belonging to Noah's household. We all belonged to Noah's household. Sometimes we forget Noah and go back to

Adam—it would do us good to go back to Noah; he is the father of us all. We were all in Noah's household and in the ark, and when there we had the knowledge of the true God. All the millions living in this world now were all represented in Noah's household and in the ark—that is what makes it so dreadful that they serve other gods. They have turned away from the blessed God whose grace and salvation they had proved in the ark. We have all stood round Noah's altar and worshipped the true God in figure. It is not a question of where Adam's sin put us—Adam's sin never made anyone idolatrous; there was no idolatry before the flood. But when God intervened in matchless grace and secured a saved household in the ark, that same household came out on the earth with the knowledge that God had saved them. It was a new beginning for the race of man, a new world; but the solemn thing is that, into that new world where God brought the knowledge of Himself in grace, idolatry came. It says of them that they served other gods; it was departure from the God they well knew. So if God comes in to secure something for Himself, He has to overcome the power of every other god; He has to show Himself superior in the conscience and affections of His creature to every other god, so that there may be repentance towards God, that we may judge everything that is of the nature of another god. We turn to God; I believe that is the essence of repentance.

The race has been influenced by Satan after God making Himself known as a Saviour God. After the time of the flood men allowed their hearts to be drawn away to other gods. God started in the pure sovereignty of mercy and called Abraham. What answers to the call of Abraham is that God brings about in our souls repentance towards Himself; it means the judgment of everything that has taken the place of God in our souls. It is remarkable that we have come into a world into which God has come as a Saviour God and has brought in Christ. So there is a

ground on which men can repent, and they can turn back. We can all turn back to the God from whom we have departed; it is not only Adam that departed, but we have all departed in our thoughts and affections, and so the first step of blessing is that we repent towards God, and when we do we find what a wonderful thing God has done. He brought Abraham from the other side of the river, He freed him from other gods, and then He gave him Isaac, and all the families of the earth were to bless themselves in Isaac—God brought in Christ.

The next thing to notice is that they went down to Egypt to learn the favour of God, what blessed favour God had to them. That answers to Paul speaking of the glad tidings of the grace of God. In Egypt they learnt what God was; they were poor idolaters—God tells us so in Ezekiel 20—they served other gods in Egypt. But God was favourable to them, and He delivered them at the Red Sea; the whole time they were in the wilderness they were learning God's favour. Every morning they found the manna and all spoke of God's favour to them; if they had not been in Egypt and had wilderness experience they would not have known it in the same way. It was a wonderful lesson, so they could sing, "My strength and song is Jah, and he is become my salvation." In the song of Exodus 15 they call themselves His people "whom thou hast redeemed." We have to learn the grace of God experimentally in that way; we prove in our Egyptian and wilderness experience how favourable God is to us.

It is an immense thing to take these wonderful experiences in the stages in which God presents them. We have first to learn to repent towards God and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; that separates us from the world of the ungodly. It brings us from the other side of the river and from serving other gods; and then we go through an experience which answers to the affliction in Egypt, and we learn how favourable God is to us. It was an immense thing to me when I began to understand the

favour of God to me; it was not until some time after I learned what it was to stand accepted before Him. We dwell a good deal on how we stand with God, and I thank God for it; but there is something more important, and that is how God stands with me, the infinite favour of God towards us through our Lord Jesus Christ. The radiant shining of the favour of God in the face of a glorified Man transcends everything that you can think of. God provides a lamb so that He can put the value of the precious blood on His people for a covering, and He can have them for Himself. It really means that God has put His wing over His people; not only is the destroying angel shut out, but God puts His wing over them. The only other scripture where the word *passover* occurs is that which speaks of Jehovah spreading His wings over His people, Isaiah 31: 5. He passes over and covers them through the death of Christ, and says, I am supremely favourable to them. And then He leads them through the Red Sea and brings His cloud between them and their enemies, and puts them on the other side with a song in their mouths. Then He starts in the wilderness and gives them a pillar of fire by night and of cloud by day. An Israelite could never look up without seeing the cloud of God's protecting love, as though God were saying, I am favourable to you. They were a poor, wretched, sinful people just like ourselves, and yet God all the time was bearing witness to His favour to them, giving them water from the rock, manna from heaven, preventing their clothes wearing out, and preserving them in a marvellous way for forty years, "nursing them in the desert," as Paul says. What a marvellous thing it is to know the grace and favour of God towards us! In spite of what I am, God is favourable to me through our Lord Jesus Christ. He says, as it were, I am delighted to be everything for you. That is the glad tidings. Who can joy in God if they do not know that? Many people joy in forgiveness, in acceptability, never a charge to be brought against them. They are

justified—that is blessed—but we joy in God when we see how favourable He is towards us; it is God Himself who blesses.

Jehovah goes on in verse 8 to speak of their going into the land of the Amorites, and He reminds them how His power had been with them to enable them to overthrow the nations on the east side of Jordan, and how Balaam came to curse but God made him bless them. What answers to that is the preaching the kingdom of God. Paul went about preaching the kingdom of God; that is power, not only grace but power. God did it so that Balaam had to say, "The shout of a king is amongst them." Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power," 1 Cor. 4: 20. Here God reminds His people that He was among them in power; "no man has been able to stand before you unto this day," as we read in the previous chapter. Have we learned the kingdom? Have we learned that there is not a lust in the flesh that we cannot overcome in the power of the kingdom of God? The power comes in so that a Christian has power to carry out everything that is right in the sight of God—that is the kingdom of God. Balaam had to say, "His king shall be higher than Agag"—that is, it is a question of power.

Jehovah then speaks of the seven nations; He reminds them that they went over Jordan and met them, and "I delivered them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you as the two kings of the Amorites; not with thy sword, nor with thy bow. And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat," verses 12, 13. That is like Ephesians 2, and answers to Paul saying he had declared to them all the counsel of God. Everything that God had in His mind has come out; it is a heavenly inheritance. God is recounting here His ways with His people, His actings in and with them. Nothing is said of their condition but what was the fruit

of divine power and grace in them; it is all the divine side, what can be ministered.

Paul calls attention to his ministry, and there was not a flaw in it. There is not a flaw in the blessed ministry which God has brought to us. He has brought to us the testimony of repentance towards Himself and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, the testimony of His favour to us and His grace, and He has brought to us the preaching of the kingdom of God, all His power for us and in us; and finally all His counsels. He has told us all that is in His heart for us—that is like Ephesians. And now what is to be the result? 'Will you serve me or not? Choose what you will do. I have told you what I am and what I have done, and now what will you do?' It is a most touching appeal. "And now fear Jehovah and serve him in perfectness and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river, and in Egypt; and serve Jehovah." It is a wonderful proposal that we should have the privilege of ministering to God. There is not a flaw in the blessed ministry that God has brought to us. People say we are such poor things! It is true, but that never carries anyone a step further spiritually. What will carry you on is what comes from God. Repentance towards God will carry you a long way; it will carry you to God. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ gives you much; it gives you all that the Lord Jesus Christ is. And the grace and favour of God give you a great deal. Then the kingdom of God gives you the power of the Spirit to go on, and the counsel of God—all these set us up. The devil would like us to say we are poor feeble things! All that is true, but nothing pleases the devil more than for us to dwell constantly on our feebleness and unworthiness, but it does not carry us a step further.

We have the thought of serving in this chapter: "Serve now Jehovah." God has come out in His wonderful grace that He might have sons to serve Him. It answers to John 4, where the Lord lets us into the secret of the giving

of God, which answers to the four-fold ministry which we are speaking about. If you knew the beneficent God, how delighted He is to bestow these things, you would ask and get living water. If you only knew how favourable God is, you could get anything from Him. What a contrast to idols! They occupy us but they never confer anything on us; there was never an idol, another god, in this world that conferred anything on its worshippers. If you must have an idol it will be a burden, it will make your heart smart, but will never give you anything; only the living God can give you anything. If we were only wise we would turn to the living God and never look in any other direction. The Lord says, "The hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for also the Father seeks such as his worshippers." The full thought of worship here is serving; that answers to what Joshua says, "Serve Jehovah." Service in Scripture does not mean what it has come to mean very largely; it means direct ministry to God, that which ministers to His pleasure. We have come to think of it as doing good to men, preaching and so on—that is one form of service, but not the highest form. The highest form of service is to minister to God.

Now Joshua says, "My heart is fixed." It is like that which underlies Paul's appeal to the elders of Ephesus. He tells them what he had been amongst them, what he had ministered, the character of his life and service. It is as much as to say, 'That is what I am, what are you?' That is a solemn word that should come home to us from our Joshua; our Joshua is Paul. He has led us into the inheritance, and brought us all the wealth of God. Now he says, What will you be?

It is important for us to recognise that all of us who have received the Spirit have some knowledge of God in grace, and He appeals to us according to that knowledge, on the ground of what He is to us. Paul says to the Corinthians, Do ye not know that the Holy Spirit dwells in you?

To the Galatians he says, How did you receive the Spirit? They were going astray on the ground of law and works, and he asks them how they received the Spirit. Did they not know that they had received the Spirit from God? He speaks to the Ephesians as a quickened company, who through the great mercy and love of God had been brought to know something of the new man, the one body, access to the Father, being built together as a habitation of God in the Spirit. Now Paul says, "I, the prisoner in the Lord, exhort you therefore to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called." That is, he appeals to them on the ground of what God had done for them, and that is the way God appeals to every one of us, and none of us can get out of it. We all have some knowledge of God's ways in grace, and whatever we know of them becomes the ground of His appeal. There is no getting out of divine appeals; you must respond to a divine appeal if there is anything of God in you. Now this is an appeal to serve Jehovah—we are appealed to in this chapter as those to whom God has been everything, and He appeals to us to serve Him.

Shechem is the place of uncompromising decision in relation to the service of God, which of course had in view the house of God. This chapter would witness to us that whatever God may have done for us, however great the extent of His love and power, the elements of idolatry remain with us and have to be refused. Shechem was where Jacob buried the idols; see Gen. 35: 4.

John in his first epistle gives us the inheritance, but, after speaking of the truth of God and eternal life, he says, "keep yourselves from idols," showing that the elements of idolatry were there. If they were not there we should not have to keep ourselves from it. There are always the elements in the human heart that will rob us of the enjoyment of God, and then we cannot love or serve Him. What extreme folly it is to turn aside from the One who has done everything for us and who has made

Himself known in supreme love to us—to turn from such a God as that to another! The Lord says in Psalm 16, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another." *Another* can only multiply sorrow, because all other gods make demands on those who serve them. God is the only one who makes no demands; He supplies everything and does everything.

Of course things take a more subtle form in Christianity. There is not the gross form, images of stone and blocks of wood, but it is remarkable that in writing to the Galatians Paul tells them they had been worshippers of idols, but now he says, 'You are doing the same thing in another way; you are turning to another and putting yourselves in bondage.' We have to watch that we do not allow elements that are natural to us which would obscure our enjoyment of God. That is in principle idolatrous; it is "another." I like the first question and answer in the Scottish catechism—"What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." There is something grand in that: to glorify God, and on the basis of that you are to enjoy Him for ever. If I do not glorify God I cannot serve Him—and if I am not enjoying Him I cannot glorify Him. Satan is bringing in every kind of idolatry at the present time—evolution instead of creation. That is another god, and what will it do for people? Nothing. Then people have all kinds of sacraments, and all kinds of religious observances that never give them affection or standing before God, instead of the one offering which perfects them for ever. The devil would like to occupy man with something of the creature to obscure the thought of God and to hinder the enjoyment of Him. We can test everything by this. Does it bring God in or shut Him out? If it shuts Him out, it is idolatrous. A man may say, I have my business to attend to, but can you carry it out with God? You need Him in the details of your business, and if it shuts Him out it is idolatry. Then a woman has her household duties. Does that shut God out? Every

duty requires God to be brought into every detail, and then it is not idolatrous. We need the blessed God who in grace and love is the source of every supply. An idol is a troublesome thing; you have to carry it, to minister to it, and it will never do a single thing for you. The tendency is to hide things. I think among the people of God things begin in a hidden way; they come in surreptitiously and are kept out of sight. If we want to go up to Bethel, they have to be brought to light and buried under the oak in Shechem. That is the place where the idols have to be buried.

There is a beautiful appeal in verse 14: "Now fear Jehovah and serve him in perfectness and in truth." It is the Old Testament version of John 4. When God appeals it is irresistible. I do not see how anyone who knows God can refuse His appeal. I admit there is a great deal of failure with us all, but we cannot refuse God's appeal. We all feel we would like to answer to it and, if we are to answer to it, we must get rid of legal thoughts of serving God. God is not served spiritually in an outward way. The apostle Paul says, "whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son." No doubt Paul served in a very practical and energetic way publicly, but the great thing was that he served with his spirit—that is the kind of service that God values. The man who serves in priestly spirit serves with his spirit in right relation to God.

Thousands of people are giving themselves to devoted service on the line that God requires from them, and they are never quite satisfied that they are answering to God's requirements. That character of service cannot be satisfactory to the heart of God or to themselves; it has an idolatrous character because it obscures the blessed God. The end of Luke's gospel answers to service being taken up. The gospel begins with a dumb priest and ends with a company of priests who were blessing and praising God.

Joshua says, "As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah." And the people say, "We will serve Jehovah,"

even when Joshua takes the other side. The people can speak of all that God has been to them and done for them and they say, "He is our God." Then Joshua says, 'If that is so, you must not forget His government; you must remember what He is in His government; He will punish you if you run to another.' We have to face divine government; we cannot allow divine grace to exclude the thought of divine government. If our ways do not please God, we come under His government; that side is for the conscience. The word 'fear' is not so much used now as in olden times, but we need the fear of God to regulate the conscience and the love of God to regulate the affections. They are like two rails on which the train runs; all spiritual progress runs on these two lines.

The wonderful thing is that all God said to the people was about Himself and what He had done, and that is what the stone heard. Joshua made a covenant; it has reached its full height here. The covenant is, like every thought of God, cumulative. Every time it is mentioned, some element is added; all God's thoughts are cumulative. He brings the thing out, then adds to that another, and another, until He has brought out the complete thought. Here the people are in the land, the inheritance, and a covenant is made with them in the full possession of the inheritance, and the stone is set up as a witness. Joshua does not say that the stone heard what they said, but the stone was a witness because it heard all that Jehovah said. That is, it is a witness to the covenant on the divine side. God loves the thought of the covenant; He says in Hosea, "I will be a husband to them." Many of us have been brought up with a legal thought of the covenant as if it implied our taking some obligations that we could not carry out. But it all depends on what we are in bondage to. If it is to God, it is perfect liberty. It is the kind of bond the woman comes into when she marries a husband. God loves the covenant idea.

There were seven covenants and every one of the seven

originated with God. The natural bond between God and His creature has been broken by sin, and there must be a moral bond to take the place of the natural bond. The covenant is a moral bond; it connects us with the knowledge of the blessed God in the sovereignty of love. The covenant is a beautiful idea; it is God saying, I want you in a bond with Myself, the strength and virtue of which will be in your knowing Me in your affections in the supremacy of My love. What could be more delightful? It all lies in the fact that we know God; that is realised in the covenant, and it is all set forth in Christ. God tells us in Isaiah that Christ Himself is the covenant.

It is very significant that this book ends with three burials. Joseph is buried, and Joshua, and Eleazar. It is God reminding His people at the very end that none of His thoughts will be effectuated apart from resurrection and a quickened people. He is reminding us at the end that Joshua did not bring the people into rest. If the thoughts of God are to be effectuated, it must be through life and incorruptibility being brought to light, and I have no doubt that Joseph had the faith of that. He realised the "dry bones" condition of Israel and that things could not be put right except in relation to resurrection power and a quickened people. He tells them to bring his bones into the land. God will not rest until He has verified every thought in regard to His people, but it will be verified on the principle of resurrection and quickening. The carrying of Joseph's bones all through the wilderness was the testimony to the people that God would carry through all His thoughts. He has introduced the covenant to His people, but has introduced it in the power of life and incorruptibility in Christ. In the meantime it is realised in our spirits as we have in our souls the power of life and incorruptibility in Christ.

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

CHAPTER 1

The book of Judges corresponds more with the present moment than the book of Joshua. In the latter we see how the land was entered upon and possessed under Joshua, who would represent the leadership of Christ by the Spirit through the apostles, securing the possession of the inheritance by spiritual power; but now the question arises as to what will happen when that extraordinary leadership of spiritual power is no longer present. That is the day we are living in. We have not the apostles now to lead us with the power of Christ, and to secure the inheritance to us. That was not intended to be permanent. Joshua grows old and dies, for he represents the order of things that passes away, and the book opens with what takes place after the death of Joshua.

The introduction of the book of Judges is important. Down to verse 5 of chapter 2 it is a preface which stands by itself, and it would appear that in this opening section of the book God would show us how things can be maintained when we have no longer apostolic authority and leading amongst us. The first principle is that it is still possible to enquire of God. It is a striking feature which is suggested to us at the opening of the book; the children of Israel asked Jehovah saying, "Which of us shall go up against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?" They enquired of Jehovah; that is the first principle of security and of spiritual guidance—the first principle on which the inheritance can be secured. Paul is our Joshua, and in bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders he says, "I commit you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give to you an inheritance among all the sanctified," Acts 20: 32. It is a question of being directly cast on God;

that is the first principle of security and blessing. In the Spirit of Christ things can be maintained, but it is a spirit of entire dependence. If apostles go, God remains.

The outlook of this chapter is that conflict is all before us. The enquiry is how the conflict is to be carried on. The enemies are all present, and it is a question now of how the war is to be carried on. With no Joshua to lead, they are directly cast on God. That is our position; we are directly cast on God, and that is our great security. It would preserve us from all defection. Before the history of failure is given, great principles are set forth that would preserve from failure; if we stand by them they will stand by us.

The result of that beautiful spirit of dependence in which they enquired is that God is with Judah. Divine principles can only be carried out in dependence. The more correct my principles are, the more I shall fail if I am not in dependence. There is often a great admixture of self-confidence when a person professes to be so sure of having the Lord's mind. It is often divorced from the spirit of dependence and readiness to be guided and built up by the word of His grace.

They were directly enquiring of God; there is no priest mentioned here. That is our privilege. We cannot do as they did at Corinth; they wrote to the apostle, and had a long letter back, answering their questions authoritatively. We cannot do that; we have no apostles. We are directly cast on God, and I think it is expedient for us that we have not the apostles. The Lord has told us that it was expedient for Him to go away, and I think it is expedient that the apostles went, so that we might be cast on God directly. It is the rock principle, for possession of the inheritance—to be cast on God.

The second great preservative principle is that we recognise the brotherhood. A person might say, I go on with God; but are you going on with your brethren? We must not move without our brethren. While it remains true that we can get everything from God—in an abstract

sense everything comes from God, even help from the brethren—but we not only get help from God, but from our brethren.

Judah needed help from Simeon his brother. Simeon had something Judah had not, and what Simeon had was necessary to Judah's success in getting the inheritance. It is a great principle of safety for us to recognise what is in our brother. When the Lord was going away He gave us a preservative commandment. He had been the centre for holding them together by the power of His own love, so when He was going away He said that the essential thing for us is to love one another. He would have us recognise the essentiality of the brotherhood. That is the principle that comes, not only into conflict, but into service. Judah showed his affection for his brother under circumstances that added lustre to it, because he had to give up part of his inheritance to Simeon. He had such a big inheritance; but he is quite unjealous of Simeon, because he calls him in as a brother.

Judah derived pre-eminence from his prince—Caleb. Caleb is the first man in the wilderness who showed that his heart was wholly set on the inheritance. What was before Caleb was the way Jehovah was moving, and Caleb was wholly following Him in it. The presence of Caleb at the head of Judah gave Judah pre-eminence in regard to the acquisition of the inheritance. It is not here so much a question of faith but of love.

Here at the beginning we have these great principles which would safeguard the inheritance—dependence on God, and the recognition of the brethren. I *need* my brethren, and then we have the Spirit as maintaining things in freshness. Historically this incident about Achsah took place before the death of Joshua, and that reminds us that Scripture was written by inspiration. Certain things are put together here morally. If we lose the leadership of the apostles we do not lose God, nor the brotherhood, nor the Spirit of God and what He can do for

us; and all these things will enable us to overcome every hostile power. So the inheritance can be fully possessed, even though outwardly it is a day of weakness, and the apostles are gone. It is only through conflict that anything has been maintained; everything connected in any way with the inheritance has been fought for. If we personally have not fought for it, others have had to fight for us.

In the book of Judges God said He would leave some of the enemies in the land so that there would be the necessity for conflict. That applies in principle to the church. God will never suffer the inheritance to be possessed without conflict. If we give up conflict, we give place to the Canaanite. Many of our brethren have secured a good deal of immunity from conflict; they have declined conflict, but they have lost the inheritance. Peace at any price is not the way to get the inheritance.

When we cease to acquire fresh territory, the enemy will soon turn the tables on us. We see in this book how the enemy turned the tables on them. It first began by their not attacking the enemy, and it is not long before the Canaanite insists on dwelling there; he becomes aggressive. If we are not aggressive the enemy will be. But it is not fighting all the time; a time of conflict is followed by a time of rest. The land had rest for so many years. If there is conflict, then there is rest, for God delights to give rest to His people, so that what is acquired by conflict can be enjoyed, not only possessed.

For instance, many years ago, when there was a ministry which sought to call attention to the blessedness of eternal life, that it might not be a mere word to us, but a life of blessedness to be enjoyed, what a battle there was! The question now is, Have we taken possession of what that battle was about? Have we the good now after forty years of what was fought for then?

The seven nations represent the complete power of evil, hostile to the pleasure of God in His people. The enemies

are not altogether external—the force of all these powers operates through the flesh. Whatever principle of evil there may be, there is that in my flesh that would join hands with it. I have to realise there is something in me that would be ready to join hands and tolerate any evil.

Everything goes on victoriously down to a certain point. In verse 19 we see the first sign of weakness: "He did not dispossess the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." It is the first sign of weakness—to be impressed by the strength and power of what is opposed to you. We ought to be impressed by the sense of the power of God.

Caleb was not in evidence then. He did not fail to take possession of his portion of the inheritance. Caleb is separated from the failure, and singled out as one who did not participate in it. It is good to know that Caleb does not die. Caleb is still alive. If Joshua dies, there is no mention in Scripture about the death of Caleb.

The upper and nether springs come in in connection with Caleb. His daughter, Achsah, represents the subjective state in the people of God that feels the need of the Spirit. She wanted springs of water. There is something positive about that; it is not exactly conflict, but springs of water are given for refreshment, that the land should be fertile; it is on the positive side. We should not be content to say we have the Spirit. As redeemed, and as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the Spirit, but we want springs, the flow of the upper and nether springs, and we shall not be preserved from the failure of the book of Judges if we have not the springs really flowing. The great fruit of the Spirit is eternal life; it is the demonstration of what the Spirit can do for the saints. Scripture says that eternal life is of the Spirit. "He that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life," Gal. 6: 9. Caleb suffers no defeat; he is an overcomer. I trust we are anxious to be overcomers, lest the conflict find us out. If we do not overcome, we shall go under. Caleb never went

under, and there is no need for *us* to go under. The Lord had to point out the sad condition of the assemblies in the book of Revelation, and He faithfully pointed out every defect. We shall see all the features of departure in this book of Judges, but He never left one assembly without an overcomer, showing that a state of things will never be permitted that will swamp what is of God.

If I am wrong at one stage I shall not be able to go on to the next. We see here the extraordinary power that there was with the people to deal with an extraordinary power of evil, and they secured things of great importance. Jerusalem was taken, and Hebron secured. It is a great thing to clear away all pretenders and opposers, and to secure a place where the Lord's Name alone is to be honoured. Jerusalem in Scripture is the city of the great King, the place where Jehovah would set His Name. Then Hebron, meaning *Company*, would answer to the truth of fellowship. If we have what is due to the Lord's Name first, then we can have the truth of fellowship.

What one has proved in the past makes one tremble; and conflict is testing, because it is easy to get into a spirit in conflict which is not of God. We see here that what is of the flesh comes down—the pretentiousness of the flesh even in the region of what is of God. There are things which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. Such a man as Adoni-bezek had seventy kings under his table. He represents the extraordinary ascendency of the man after the flesh in a sphere which belonged to God, but when he comes to Jerusalem he dies. When what is due to the Lord's Name is recognised, all that kind of thing dies. There was no repentance, but he recognised the justice of his punishment, and all those who come under the government of God will have to own the justice of it. God is not mocked. We need not think anything will fail to produce its appropriate fruit.

I have been thinking of the epistle of John in connection with Judges. John warns us against the inroads of the

enemy, who has to be dispossessed, but he shows that we can have anything we want by asking. "Whatsoever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments, and practise the things which are pleasing in his sight," 1 John 3: 22. The Lord says, "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it," John 14: 14. He does not say, I will give it consideration, but "I will do it." It shows how well we are set up if identified with that Name. Then John dwells on love for the brethren. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren," 1 John 3: 14. It is because we love God that we love the brethren.

The fact that a few saints can walk together without human order is marvellous. We can understand people keeping together with conditions of rule or worldly principles—friends, plenty of amusement, social links, etc.—but for people of different characters and temperaments to keep together in the truth is a great marvel; it is the power of God. No power could keep them together but the power of God.

We have seen that the failure of the church came in after the apostles passed away; here it is after the death of Joshua. Evidently the first sign of weakness is that they could not drive out the enemy, "the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron"; but in the same verse we read that "Jehovah was with Judah." The power of God was there, but they did not take account of it, and I believe that was the first defection in the assembly—failure to take account of the power of God by the Spirit. If Jehovah was with His people, what were chariots of iron! They might as well have been made of tissue paper.

Judah failed to recognise the power of God as present by the Spirit. That was the initial failure of the church. The Spirit was with the people of God, though dishonoured and ignored. In the earliest writings that followed the days of the apostles, we do not find the

recognition of the presence and power of the Spirit. It is a great thing to recognise that the power of the chariots of iron is nothing if God is dwelling in His people by the Spirit. John speaks of it in relation to many antichrists, but then he says, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world," 1 John 4: 4.

The recognition of the presence of the Spirit would produce suitable conditions. Does not Paul bring it before the Corinthians on that line? He calls them to recognise the presence of the Spirit as the means to bring about definite suitable conditions. How could anyone recognise the presence of the Spirit in himself or in the assembly, without being powerfully affected? To recognise the presence of God, and not be affected, would be impossible. Even an unbeliever falls on his face; what then about a believer?

"The children of Benjamin did not dispossess the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day," verse 21. Jerusalem is the city of the great King, and it is the place where Jehovah sets His Name, and it is the place from which the word of Jehovah went forth. So it represents the rights of Christ. The Jebusites represent those powers of evil which would hinder the rights of Christ from being in exercise. They were the old inhabitants. It is not impossible for anything that has come into christendom to come in with us. We are not exempt or immune from anything. We are as much in danger of ignoring the presence of the Spirit as the early church. We know they did, and we are in the same danger, and the rights of Christ as King, Lord, Head, and Son over God's house, are all set forth in Jerusalem; it is the centre of rule and divine influence. The Spirit is not taken account of now in christendom, and there are influences present which would challenge the rights of Christ. That largely opened the door to evil when it first came in amongst us. The Holy Spirit was only thought of as an

influence, and people have prayed that the Spirit may be poured out. He was not only an influence but an absent influence in their thoughts.

Think of the rights of Christ as Lord and Head! Christendom is baptised, but what is baptism if there is no recognition of the rights of Christ? See what John says about commandments; we are apt not to think of them, for the word has a legal sound, but it belongs to Jerusalem. "Commandment" is an important word with John; no writer speaks so much of them. If christendom has departed from them, we have to recognise them as the things that must not be surrendered at any cost. It is love that is in authority; that is why His commandments are not grievous. There is not a single commandment that has not come with the authority of love. The One who commands is the One who died for me. What could be more touching!

The first weakness in the assembly after the death of the apostles was a failing to take account of the power of the Spirit there, and the second, in figure, is that there was a failure to dispossess the influences that stood against the rights of Christ.

Then, in connection with Joseph, *Bethel* comes into view—the house of God. "They went up against Bethel; and Jehovah was with them," verse 22. It is remarkable that the Spirit of God tells us that Jehovah was with them. It seems to me to accentuate their failure. If Jehovah was with them, why did they want to solicit the help of a citizen, one of the inhabitants of the city? They solicited help from that which they were set to overthrow, and the result was they perpetuated what God was set to destroy. God would have Luz to disappear, and Bethel to be there instead. But the result of their getting help from this source was that another Luz was set up. Would not Jehovah have shown them the way into the city? If we solicit help from the world, we have to repay them. One good turn deserves another. They said, If you show the

way we will show you kindness. It was a bargain. This man's affections were not identified with Bethel, but with Luz; he loved the old place, and calls the new city Luz. It was different from Rahab; Rahab's heart had been captured. This man's heart was still in Luz, and he carried it with him; he built a city and called it Luz. He had no affection for the house of God. The soliciting of this man's help perpetuated "unto this day" what God would have destroyed utterly.

Luz means *bent*, what is not straight. In christendom all the truth of Scripture is *bent*—all twisted and made to suit man, but in the house of God all must be straight. It has typical allusion to the way the truth has been distorted. If the Spirit is not taken account of, influences militate against the rights of Christ; the next thing is that the truth is bent, and made unsuitable for the house of God, which is the pillar and base of the truth. Scripture speaks of cutting in a straight line the word of truth; the truth is never bent. The idea of what is bent is that you go round about to reach God, and nothing like that suits the house of God. Holiness is there, the truth is there, and it is always straight. The Lord says of Himself, "He that is holy, he that is true." Truth is never twisted; it is always straight.

The next one we read of is Manasseh. "And Manasseh did not dispossess Beth-shean and its dependent villages, nor Taanach and its dependent villages, nor the inhabitants of Dor and its dependent villages, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and its dependent villages, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and its dependent villages; and the Canaanites would dwell in that land. And it came to pass when Israel became strong, that they made the Canaanites tributary; but they did not utterly dispossess them," verses 27, 28. We seem to go down one step at a time. They "*would dwell*," suggesting an exercise of will which is allowed to be in the ascendant, the principle of allowing things to be determined by the will of man rather

than by the will of the Lord. What man wishes is accepted as contributory. Help is accepted from the world; that which should be destroyed mercilessly is condoned, and allowed to be contributory.

There is a further step in verses 29 and 30 as to Ephraim and Zebulun. It says of each that "the Canaanites dwelt among them and became tributaries." If we admit the principles of the world, if we tolerate them, they will soon *dwell* with us.

Then in verse 32 the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, and Naphtali dwelt among the Canaanites too. In figure the people of God are seen right down at the level of the world; not only are the principles of the world seen in the people, but they are dwelling in the world; it is the decline and fall of the assembly.

In Dan the inhabitants have the upper hand, and Dan is driven to the hill country. It is the history of the downfall of the assembly. The power of what is contrary to God is able to drive out the people of God. The hill-country has always been available; all through the dark ages when the world had got into the church, and the church into the world, there were those who lived in the hill country. Zacharias and Elizabeth lived there, and many went to visit them there. How beautifully people can talk who live in the hill country!

I think that Luke 1 is one of the most cheering chapters in Scripture. It was at the time when Israel was apostate—everything publicly was in the hands of the enemy, and we find people dwelling in the hill-country, their hearts full of divine actings, and in lowly dependence. These humble people unknown in the religious world, or regarded with contempt if they had been known, have the light of God with them in the hill-country. What God looks for is a poor and afflicted people. Bochim represents the right spirit in a day when the Christian profession has utterly failed.

I am not suggesting that Dan should have yielded to the enemy as he did, but simply to indicate that, however great the power of the enemy may be, he will always have to leave the hill country to the people of God. In a day of decline there will always be a hill country. The church histories men have written are the public history; what I want to know, and am expecting to read by and by in the world to come, is God's church history of the spiritual work carried on in saints, of His own blessed and personal work in the face of all the hostile power of the world, the flesh and the devil; how He kept them in the hill country even in the darkest days, when the power of the enemy was at its highest.

CHAPTER 2

Our attention is called in chapter 1 to the increasing weakness of the people, how they gradually surrendered more and more to the enemy. I suppose that the opening of this chapter gives the secret of it all.

The whole secret was that they had failed to go to Gilgal. Gilgal was the place where the angel of Jehovah was; divine power was there. I do not think we are told previously that the angel of Jehovah was there. The people had not been back to Gilgal since the time of Joshua, and that was the secret of their weakness. There had been victories, but victories that retained elements of weakness. Gilgal was the place of circumcision, the place where all connected with ourselves is cut off in unsparing self-judgment; that is the place of power and the angel of Jehovah is there.

The circumcision of the Christ is what one may call the great circumcision; that is, the flesh has been absolutely cut off in the death of Christ, but then we have to come

to it as privilege and power, and, having come to it once, we have to recur to it. It is obvious that the lack of going back to Gilgal was the secret of all their weakness. God brings us back to it in experimental judgment of all connected with ourselves. In the early part of Joshua, we see that Joshua and all the people come to the camp in Gilgal. The twelve stones taken out of Jordan were there. Nothing is to remain, but what came out of death with Christ. Nothing that went into the death of Christ will do for God. It is what came out of that death that is serviceable to God, and that involves the cutting off of the whole body of the flesh. Paul said, "*I* am crucified with Christ"; it was experimental with him. If there is anything about me unsuitable to God's resurrection world, it has to be cut off in self-judgment if I am to be in spiritual power. Self-judgment is the opposite to self-occupation. Self-occupation must be that I am either occupied with good self or bad self, but if I come to the cutting off of the flesh in the death of Christ and judge myself in the light of that, good and bad flesh is gone. God will not support the flesh. The constant judgment of what is connected with self has to be maintained; otherwise there is no power.

Weeping in itself is weakness and not power, but it shows some remains of right feeling. When departure begins we do not lose all right feeling at once. When Jehovah said He would not drive out the inhabitants, there was pious feeling—they wept, and they had some sense of what was due to Jehovah; they sacrificed there, but it was Bochim, not Gilgal. It was a change in the ways of God.

The very presence of these things, which came in as the result of the government of God, is a test. They were left as a test, so, if there were any overcoming spirit in Israel it was brought to light; it was proved whether the people would walk in obedience to Jehovah's commandments. In the same way, anything that came in in the Christian profession, and from which we suffer, comes in as a test whether we can walk in obedience. There must be sects,

so that the approved may be manifested.

A great deal of the trouble which we have amongst ourselves is because we do not feel with God the state of the public church. The public position is in view here—the public history of the people of God; the secret of power has been departed from, and God does not promise restoration of it. We know from our church history—Revelation 2 and 3—how things go from bad to worse, but there are overcomers. There is, in the faithfulness of God, recovery. Here God raises up judges. God sees how His people are spoiled and damaged, and He raises up judges who can deliver His people from the causes of defeat. God looks down and sees His people not enjoying their inheritance; they are oppressed and afflicted. Are we enjoying ours? If we think of the church as the people of God we shall see it was brought by apostolic leading into all that was the mind of God for them. In the epistle to the Ephesians Paul brings the people into all the mind of God for them, but he finishes by saying, You must fight for it. It is a testing time, and to fight we must have power. If we get away from the truth of Colossians, i.e., circumcision, we shall not be of much use in Ephesian warfare. Ephesian armour is *moral* state: "girt about with truth . . . the breast-plate of righteousness . . . the helmet of salvation . . . the shield of faith . . . feet shod with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace." All these things involve state, and we cannot have the state without the deepest self-judgment. There is no place but Gilgal where we can put on the armour.

Bochim is the public position here. There is no longer the power of God publicly with His people; they are left face to face with enemies whom they are not able to dispossess. They still sacrificed to Jehovah; they were not actually in idolatry, but the power is lost. They had not yet lost all spiritual feeling, or sense of what was due to the Lord.

In these conditions God intervenes in raising up judges,

and His power is there with the judge. All through the history of the church God has raised up judges, saviours, and given them power to deliver His people from what hinders them at that particular moment. God has always supported His servants, and those who listened got the gain of it. What deliverance God gives is for the whole church, though only a few may get the good of it.

Power is always found in connection with self-judgment. If self-judged we make much of Christ, and then there is spiritual power seen in the greatest outward weakness. As long as the judges lived there was deliverance. But the people would not listen, even when God raised up judges, and chapter 2 shows how positive idolatry came in. As long as the generation of Joshua lived, they had the knowledge of Jehovah, but then another generation came in, and it is said solemnly of them that they did not know Jehovah or His works. It is very serious, after all the provision God had made for things being passed on to the next generation in the land. It would seem to intimate some failure on the part of the first generation.

The first generation was marked by spiritual weakness in getting away from Gilgal. Then there must be a personal history with God; parents cannot pass faith on to their children. Our parents may have us baptised and instruct us in the truth, but they cannot pass faith on. We have to take that up for ourselves. Paul speaks of unfeigned faith in Timothy's mother and grandmother, but he says, it is "*in thee also*." I have to take it up for myself. Otherwise you would find people coming into the place of privilege in a hereditary way, without soul history, and they do not know God. These people forsook Jehovah because they did not know Him or His works. Very soon in the church there were a great many who were externally in church privilege with no soul history, and that opened the way for idolatry. We have all to take up the exercise as to our personal faith. I may hear what my

father could tell me, and I may come into the place of privilege which my father enjoyed, and yet have no soul history. There were people with no experimental knowledge of the bondage of Egypt, of redemption, of the Red Sea, of Jordan, of the brazen serpent. They did not know Jehovah, and yet there they were in the land. The presence of such people opened the way for idolatry. It raises the question with us, How far have we been influenced and carried by those gone before? Many of us have come into things easily; they were ready made for us. The question is, Have we faith for it? What have we received directly and personally from God?

Ministry, if worth anything, produces personal exercises, and that leads to faith and soul history. The book of Judges represents the public position, the church committed to the responsibility of the whole truth of God. The church was introduced by the apostles into the whole privilege of christianity. Has it been enjoyed? Has God been glorified? After having such privileges and light, is it true that we are serving Baal? It says, "They served Baal and the Ashtoreths." Baal has reference to the energies of service and Ashtoreth represents what corrupts the affections. If a soul has a history with God he wants to serve God; he wants his energies to be spent in the service of God, and he wants to enjoy the land. An idol is a master; Baal means *master* or *possessor*. The question is, Who is my master? Who possesses me? It is easy to be possessed by the desire to make money. A man who is devoting his energies to making money is a worshipper of Baal; he is serving Baal. This book shows us how easy it is to come under idolatrous influence. It is very solemn that Paul should say to the Corinthians, those in the assembly participating in privileges outwardly: "Some have not the knowledge of God; I speak to your shame." They had fallen under the power of the enemy. If we walk in self-judgment we shall not fall under any influence which is adverse to God, but, if we do not judge ourselves,

we shall. We all have to learn to refuse the things that appeal to us. The devil tempts me with something I like; I suffer if I refuse it, but I cease from sin, and God is preserved before my soul—that is the blessing of walking in piety. The Christian begins the day by praying to be preserved from the influences of the world and of the flesh. He wants his energies to be for the service of God, and his affections for Christ, and then we do not fall under the enemies who oppress and crush the people of God so that they are deprived of all pleasure in the enjoyment of the land. What a grief to God to look down and see His people occupied with things that stand in no relation to God or to His service, things for the glorification of self, which minister to the thoughts of the flesh! God sees His people spending themselves in that way, and it grieves Him. It means that they have no joy.

Caleb went to Gilgal to claim his inheritance, Joshua 14: 6, and he received it, and was blessed. Caleb was a man of power. This is a divine picture of how the people of God have been robbed of their inheritance by not maintaining circumcision—self-judgment, and the enemy has appealed to them in various ways, and turned them into idolaters. The enjoyment of the land has been lost, and, instead of overflowing with joy, feeding on fat things and drinking wine on the lees well refined, they are filled with the worthless things of this world. *God feels it.* If I have not been enjoying the inheritance to-day, God is grieved.

CHAPTER 3

The unfaithfulness of the people was the original cause of their enemies being left. But we find here that Jehovah left them, and that He had a purpose in leaving them. Everything contrary to the truth that has had a place in connection with the people of God must have come in first

through unwatchfulness, and want of zeal for God, but then God had a purpose in leaving it there.

It is suggestive that a generation arose that did not know Jehovah. There is a certain responsibility with us concerning the next generation. Paul was very concerned about the next generation, that there were not very many on whom he could rely, and we could not say it was from lack of parental care. He was a true father and mother, but there were not many of whom he could say that they were his true children in the faith. Timothy was one. There is an exercise as to the generation following, whether they are prepared to take up the faith of the parents. Our parents are not able to give us faith; we have to take it up for ourselves. They can bring us into the place of Christian privilege and instruct us, and pass on as teaching all they know, but they cannot give us faith. It is for us to take up what our fathers have left. It is an exercise for those of us getting old as to what kind of generation we leave behind; we should be delighted to see them with more definite purpose and faith than we have. It delights us to see a young brother or sister with more definiteness of heart to follow the Lord than we have. It humbles us about ourselves, but delights us to see it. If the Lord tarries, there will be another generation, and it is a serious matter that it should be a spiritual generation. Many times God has intervened, even in the history of the church, and there has been a remarkable movement of revival, but departure has come as soon as the vessel was removed. We see it all through Judges; deliverance comes in, but, as soon as the vessel of divine power dies, the spiritual movement ceases.

Things are left; it has not pleased the Lord to come in to remove all kinds of evils that have come in. He has left them there as a test, and the enemy is always on the ground; therefore conflict must go on to the end if things are to be maintained for God. There never will be a complete clearance of the enemy; he will not be cleared off the

scene until the church is gone. When it is a question of dispossessing the enemy, we have all to learn war. *We* have to learn it. The battles fought by our predecessors do not deliver us; we have all to take up conflict. If we do not take up conflict we shall fall under the power of something evil.

We see in verse 6 that they took up unequal yokes. The principle of separation from evil is fundamental, and nothing is maintained for God except on that principle. Here we find that the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites; that is how they formed these links. People form these links because their parents are dwelling in the world, and the very thought of separation is given up; that opens the door. If there is not an inward spirit of separation, it opens the door for unholy links and associations. No temptation to take up an unequal yoke, or to give up separation, begins outwardly; it begins *inwardly*.

In verse 4 we read, "They were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of Jehovah, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses." The commandment is a test of how we stand in relation to the Lord and His will. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." If His commandments do not rule my affections, I have departed from Him inwardly. I may be walking perfectly before the brethren, but I am away inwardly and, if I am not restored, I shall eventually give up separation in some outward way.

The first departure was a giving up of the truth of the calling. In figure they were partakers of the heavenly calling, and the first departure was giving it up; they dwelt among the Canaanites. That is why Chushan-rishathaim comes up and gets power. He was king of the very country out of which God called Abraham, and if we give up in heart the heavenly calling, we shall fall under the influence of the place out of which we are called. Idolatry was there. What exposed the people to this was that they had idolatry among themselves; in verse 6 we read that

they intermarried with the nations and served other gods. It makes one very anxious about the state of one's inward affections. If they are not kept for the Lord, it is only a question of time before we get away publicly.

Here it was eight years before they realised the true position. They came under an alien influence for eight years. Saints may miss a great deal, and be a long time before they realise it, but when they do they cry to the Lord. Satan presents bondage as liberty; he says, You please yourself, do what you like; and he makes it appear as if it was liberty, and people often take long to realise that the line they are on is robbing them of the enjoyment of the land. When they do wake up, they cry to the Lord, and He raises up a saviour. There never was a saint who cried to the Lord about things that hinder from enjoying the inheritance, but that God raised up a saviour for them.

It would not be like God to leave us under bondage when we want to be free from it. If the people of God woke up to the fact that they were not enjoying the inheritance, and truly desired to, they would get deliverance from every enemy, whether Moabite, Canaanite or Philistine. We never have the same battles again; always some new, fresh phase has to be met, but in every case there is a deliverer. "And the children of Israel cried to Jehovah; and Jehovah raised up a saviour to the children of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother." What an exercise he had to see the state of things, and yet it went on eight years before God could use him! God waits on the exercises of His people. You say, Why does not the Lord deliver His people from all the corruptions of christendom? Why do not they separate from it? He waits on their exercises; He waits for them to cry to Him for deliverance.

Othniel means *Powerful man of God.* A man of God would stand for God, and I believe he is the first man in Scripture of whom it was said that the Spirit of Jehovah

was upon him. It is the Spirit of the Lord raising up a standard among the people. Othniel came of a good stock; he was a near relation to Caleb—he had taken Kirjath-sepher, the city of books; that is, the wisdom of the world. Kirjath-sepher becomes Debir—*speaking*, he is ready to listen to divine speaking. Othniel represents the kind of man God can raise up, and he has a good wife; his affections were rightly placed. He married Achsah, not a daughter of the land, but one thoroughly set for the south land, and for springs of water as well. A man like that was morally qualified to be a saviour.

Othniel was a disciplined man; he had to wait eight years. All the servants of God have to learn to wait for the exercises of the people of God. What a discipline to see the people of God suffering from unbelief, and to have to walk with them in their afflictions! Caleb had to wait forty years. Nothing tests us like patience; it is one of the greatest features we can possess. Caleb was a man who could wait forty years for the land.

What is the value of my having light if I cannot carry the brethren? I have not only to be true to the light, but to wait on the exercises of the brethren, and carry them. We cannot carry anything in an arbitrary way. These men felt the oppression, and when the time came they were available, and the result of their intervention was that the land had rest. We are not fighting all the time; God gives periods of rest. For the time being the enemy is held in check, according to the energy of faith and the state of the people. God waits for the exercises of His people, and those who have faith have to wait too. Those whom the Lord raised up as deliverers had the mind of the Lord for the moment. In the history of the church, when there was a readiness and exercise for it, God has raised up one and given spiritual light and leading, and has always been with that man whom He has raised up. If God has raised up a man, He will stand by him to the end, and never let him drop. If a man *sets up* to be a leader, or if people set

him up, he will have a disastrous end.

The next oppressor was Moab. Moab was a people kindred with Israel; they were the children of Lot, and they represent the influence of what is natural. Lot had a wonderful opportunity, and he was what we call a true believer—the Spirit of God called him a righteous man—but he was influenced by what is natural. It says of Eglon that he was very fat. Moab represents a condition of things easily nourished, and that can soon acquire great proportions. Nothing is easier than to nourish what is natural until it becomes fat, but there is no liberty until the fat man is killed. There is no liberty for enjoyment of the land if we are under the influence of the Moabite. It represents the natural element that can work in the true believer. Lot was influenced by the natural to choose the well-watered plain, and that led him to Sodom. We are all in danger of that. I suppose nothing hinders the people of God more than their friends, acquaintances and relations. They keep on with what is natural. It is much easier to go on with people with whom you are in contact, and go on in a friendly way, than to take a definite stand for God. That is the influence, the oppression of the Moabite.

God raised up Ehud, a left-handed man, as deliverer from the Moabites. God takes up men that have apparently a good deal that hampers them. This book brings out the odd character of people that God can use. He uses unusual instruments, such as a left hand. Shamgar had an ox-goad—an uncomely weapon, but effective. Samson had a jaw-bone of an ass. God uses things one would not expect. The power is within, not with the instrument. Ehud knew what was needed at that time. The people were on wrong lines; they sent a present, showing the servile condition they were in—like people keeping up friendly links with those who are not the people of God. Ehud knew what was needed; he was not on the line of presents, but of a short sword. He knew the fat man must be killed, and he killed him. We have to kill the Moabite

in ourselves. When he has killed him, he blows a trumpet, and gives a spiritual lead, and others are prepared to follow. That is the principle of leading among the people of God. Are we ready to follow when the trumpet sounds? They were ready to go, and they followed and killed ten thousand men, all fat men.

Many are exercised to-day, but they are held by friendly links, so they are not prepared to use the two-edged sword. We need to use the sword, so as not to allow ourselves to be robbed of the enjoyment of the inheritance by our acquaintances, or our relatives, or anything on the line of the natural.

CHAPTER 4

There are very interesting features from a spiritual point of view in this chapter and the next. We see quite new unfoldings and modes of divine activity. We have always to be prepared for that; God does not repeat Himself. This time it is the king of Canaan who oppresses the people. We have had Mesopotamia, Moab, and the Philistine; now it is Canaan.

Canaan means *low-land*; another interpretation is *trader*. It seems to suggest the minding of earthly things, seeking one's own interests; that is a terrible oppression to fall under. To be minding earthly things and seeking our own things is a coming down altogether from the elevation proper to the calling of God, and it is a formidable power. Sisera had nine hundred chariots of iron. There is no greater snare or scourge among the people of God than that.

God meets this condition by the introduction of a new element—He introduces a prophetess. We see now prophetic light breaking in, and, if God gives prophetic light, it has a very far-reaching bearing. The song of Deborah goes right on to the finish of all fighting; it looks

on to a time when all the enemies of Jehovah perish and when the way each has behaved in conflict can be reviewed. Some have been valiant, some slack and careless. The next chapter is like the judgment-seat. When prophetic light comes in, it always involves the finish of God's ways—God having the last word. The idea of prophecy is God having the last word, evil and good being consigned to their places. We are in conflict to-day, with prophetic light that the way we behave is going to be reviewed. God will take account of all we do while the battle is going on.

Sisera represents the leader of the world power that is opposed to the pleasure of God in His people. All that power is going to be overthrown, but the battle is going on, and each one of us has a responsibility, and the question is, How are we behaving ourselves in the battle? Are we maintaining our heavenly character, our associations, and our spirits in the light of the prophetic word? Then we have Deborah. A woman in Scripture presents state, and we see in Deborah a state characterised and governed by the mind of God. She is an overcomer, because she dwelt under her palm tree, which means victory. She lived between Ramah and Bethel, the *high places* and the *house of God.* Ramah answers to Ephesians, and Bethel, the house of God, is the place on earth where we have access to what is heavenly—the gate of heaven.

If we accept the prophetic word, and are found in a state which is governed by the prophetic word, we shall be in superiority to the Canaanites. Canaan lives on low ground, and the conflict is always between low ground and high ground. We might be taken up with religious things on earth. Paul speaks of many who mind earthly things in contrast to those who have their citizenship in heaven. The Canaanite typifies those who mind earthly things, seeking their own advantage. Paul speaks, too, in the end of Romans, of those who cause division, and says a hard thing of them: "such serve not our Lord Jesus

Christ, but their own belly." There is some selfish object which governs them. If they were governed by the Lord Jesus Christ, they would never cause division among the brethren. If my god is my belly, I am on a very low ground—and Canaan is low ground. If people fall under that, it is a scourge.

The Spirit of God says that Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth, suggesting that she recognised headship. Any vessel raised up of God would recognise divine order. God could not raise up a prophetess to traverse His own order. If the Lord gives prominence to a woman, she will be prominent in a way suitable to the position, and will recognise headship.

There is such a thing as being governed by the influences of heaven. It is said, "From heaven was the fight"; that is a very remarkable word in the next chapter. If the fight is from heaven, everything connected with it must be of a heavenly character. "The stars from their courses fought with Sisera." We must be governed by divine principles, and be in the power of what is heavenly, and live where Deborah lived. The mother is greater than the soldier. That is an important principle—the "mother in Israel", and leadership amongst the people of God is dependent on that. There was no leadership until Deborah arose, a "mother in Israel." We see in Deborah a state governed by the mind of God, and maternal qualities along with it, signifying that she is able to foster and cherish that kind of thing in Israel. The mother is greater than the soldier; state is more important than action. It would not have been suitable for her to lead the battle, and she keeps her place.

Jerusalem above is our mother, and there is power to overcome the Canaanitish influence. The things of earth are morally base and low, but if we have a mother shedding the influences of heaven on our spirits, what an impulse it gives!

The next chapter is like the judgment-seat of Christ.

When all is over, the question is, How did you behave? Did you come back like Zebulon? Or hang back like Meroz? The next chapter is a grand review. The prophetic word carries to the finish of God's ways. If you learn the spiritual state represented in Deborah, the state governed by the mind of God, there is room for God to move by whom He will. He selects Barak and Naphtali and Zebulon as the kind of instruments He will use. If we want to be delivered from what is of earth, we must be prepared for deliverance in God's way. We have to recognise sovereignty. Barak is mentioned, because he is the one who led Israel to victory. It was weakness on his part that he would not go without Deborah, and so he lost some of the honour. The word of Jehovah should have been enough. There was an element of weakness, along with his faith which is mentioned in Hebrews. He lost some of his glory, some of the honour God would have put on him. Often in the battles of Jehovah we are made conscious of our weakness, and it is a very happy thing if we do not exhibit it publicly. If I was rightly exercised about my weakness, I should have a deep sense of it before God in secret, but should not exhibit it publicly.

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual, not carnal. God uses His own instruments, weak in the eyes of men, but strong to the pulling down of strongholds. This book is remarkable for that; an ox-goad, a tent-pin, a jawbone of an ass, show that God is pleased to use things that man would think of no adequacy at all, but would seem ridiculous and unsuitable. God can use anything, and make anything effectual, if faithfulness is behind it. The iron chariots show the formidable character and strength of what is on a low level—Canaanitish. You find that Barak is told to go to Mount Tabor, and he goes to Kedesh. That is, there is the thought of elevation in connection with the position. Tabor means *mountain height,* and Kedesh means *holy*. That is the position to take up. If we get there, the hostile power only comes up to be

destroyed. Ten thousand men are not much before a great army, but Jehovah went out before them, and the army of Sisera fell. "Not *one* was left." In verse 24 we read: "The hand of the children of Israel ever advanced, and prevailed against Jabin, king of Canaan, until they had cut off Jabin king of Canaan." It looks on prophetically to the complete destruction of every power hostile to the thoughts of Jehovah for His people. If we get a prophetic word from God and have the state governed by it, we are well assured of God's ultimate victory. It is most important that there should be this state in correspondence with the prophetic word. That is the importance of God giving a prophetess, emphasising the importance of state. The vessel is to be in a state corresponding with the light that is from God, and there is no getting over a spiritual state governed by God.

Then there is this remarkable incident of Jael at the end of the chapter. Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, and her husband had made a move of separation. They had separated from those mentioned in chapter 1, verse 16, who "had gone up out of the city of palm-trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad, and they went and dwelt with the people." There seems to have been an exercise to be in definite separation. So Heber leaves those mixed up with the people, and takes a more definite place of separation, and is a tent-dweller. There was a spiritual history behind Jael's act. There was a measure of separation; still, there is peace between Heber and Sisera. There is another link to be separated; Jael had another step to take. Souls often move in a measure of separation, and sometimes they settle down, and stop and think they have come into separation, and perhaps there are some other links; they are going on in a peaceful and friendly way with something hostile to God. Jael took up this exercise; the point came when she felt nothing would do but uncompromising fidelity to Jehovah. There must be unsparing destruction

of anything hostile to Jehovah. Sisera was an enemy to Jehovah, and so he must be killed. Jael represents the unsparing faithfulness to God that even a woman can be characterised by in her own sphere. "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed among women *in the tent*!" She is in the tent; she acts in fidelity. The elder, John, writes to the elect lady, and admonishes her to be faithful in the tent. She is not even to give a man a salutation if he is not bringing the doctrine of Christ. There is to be no compromise. Sisera represented to Jael the whole power hostile to the people of God, and she acts towards him with unsparing decision. One might think that it was not a womanly act, but it is an act God recognised as one which caused her to be blessed among women.

Jael pierced Sisera's temples, suggesting the destruction of the whole mind of man. We have to destroy it in ourselves; Sisera is in ourselves. There is the constant presence of the power that would lead us to take low ground, causing us to serve ourselves, our own bellies. If we get to bottom, it is self, and that has to be killed; drive the tent-pin into that and kill it. It would typify every act of faithfulness done by a sister; for example, a man comes to the door who does not bring the doctrine of Christ, and she will not let him in or say good-morning; thus she secures victory for all the people of God. It is possible for a sister to destroy morally within her own sphere all that will be destroyed from the presence of the Lord when He comes. She can destroy every influence, every power that will be destroyed at the coming of the Lord.

CHAPTER 5

We could not suppose that such a lovely song as this would be given to us by the inspiration of the Spirit of God without there being important instruction for us in

it. It is a song that we need to understand in a special way at the present time. This song is praise to God in a different way from the song of Moses, who celebrated the great actings of God in redemption, and the fruit of those actings. I trust we have all learned to sing the song of Moses, but in the last days we have to learn to sing the song of Deborah and Barak. I suppose one would hardly be a Christian at all if one could not sing with Moses, but it is only overcomers who can sing with Deborah and Barak. The song of Moses is the common property of all: it is the song of the redeemed; but the song of Deborah and Barak is a song sung in difficult times, a song which celebrates how God comes in for His people, and how He provides what is needed for their deliverance in a very dark day. One is as important as the other.

This is the only song in Judges, and therefore it is of great importance. This particular victory over the king of Canaan is taken up by the Spirit of God as an occasion in which to point out how God would deliver His people at all times right on to the time when the wicked will perish and the righteous shine forth in the kingdom. It is a song celebrating God's resource in a difficult day. When God intervenes to deliver His people, everyone is tested; that is how we are tested to-day by the way God comes in to deliver His people from oppression. We are tested as to whether we identify ourselves wholeheartedly with the deliverer or not. If God has brought in a deliverer, my place in the kingdom will depend on whether I identify myself with the deliverer, and am prepared to take my part in the conflict as a good soldier, or whether I evade it. If the latter, I might possibly come under the curse.

All utterances in Scripture have something distinctive. In this song God raises up leaders for His people. It is the celebration of divine leadership. "For that leaders led in Israel, For that the people willingly offered themselves, Bless Jehovah," verse 2. The state of Israel is sorrowful as described in verse 7: "The leaders ceased in Israel,

Ceased until that I Deborah arose, That I arose a mother in Israel." There was no one in Israel to give a spiritual lead, and it has been like that among the people of God many times.

Verse 12 refers to the mother and leader. The mother is represented in Deborah who brings leadership into evidence, those who can cherish the Israel of God with maternal affection—that is the element that produces leadership. When God raises up leadership He does it in connection with the yearnings of the mother. You must have the mother before the soldier. Before the Lord raised up such distinct leadership as in the beginning of this century, there was the spirit of yearning and maternal affection for the people of God, and God answered it by raising up a spiritual leadership to deliver from all that hinders their enjoyment of the inheritance.

The principle of leadership was first established in the Lord Himself. The Lord is the great Leader, and it is only as persons follow Him that they are competent to lead His people. The Lord never departed from, or shunned the highway; He never went by crooked paths, and He alone is entitled to say "*Follow me.*" The apostles never tell us to follow them. Paul said "Imitate me," but the Lord was the only One to say, "*Follow me.*"

There is a way through this world, and the Lord went in that way, and He was the great Leader. He went to His own and He said, "I have overcome the world." His last presentation of Himself to the assembly is as the Overcomer; "even as I also have overcome," Rev. 3: 21. He is the One to follow. All leadership is found in those who follow Him. All others are patterns, never objects; the Lord alone is the Object.

There is another thing of importance, that is, that if the Lord provides a leader, or leaders, in His goodness for His people, He always provides followers, those that follow the Lord, those that offer themselves willingly. That is the great subject of the song—leaders, and those who

offered themselves willingly to be identified in the conflict with the leaders. Meroz did not identify itself, and was cursed. There is a special application. If we are not prepared for conflict it is not much use to read Joshua or Judges; they are books for soldiers, for warriors. If we do not take part in the conflict, we shall not get the spoil. Nothing has been gained in the church of God since the days of the apostles, save through conflict, and God has continually aroused exercises in His people by raising up leaders. It is of no use to say we have no leaders; that challenges the faithfulness of God. How could God tell me to obey my leaders if there are not any! This has been the history of things in the church. There has been a great departure, and God has raised up a spiritual leadership in one or more, and all the overcomers have identified themselves with the leaders. The test of an overcomer is to be able to perceive when God is giving a lead, and to identify himself as a soldier with the spiritual movement of the moment. Overcomers were the product of Deborah's ministry. God raised up a prophetic ministry—a prophetess. She carried on the ministry for twenty years. She was an overcomer, for she dwelt under a palm-tree. The result of prophetic ministry is a generation of overcomers. All those who offered themselves willingly are begotten of the prophetic ministry of the moment. An overcomer is begotten by the mind of God made known at a particular moment.

Reuben had great searchings of heart. He was tossed up and down, and ended in doing nothing. He represents a man who goes through a tremendous amount of exercise as to conflict, and great deliberations and debatings, but it ends in his stopping where he was. If he did not come to share in the battle, what is the use of his exercise? One has known people going through seas of exercise which end in their standing in neutrality, and there is no such thing in the wars of God. Neutrality is the base expedient of modern times.

From verse 14 we have a list of those who came up to identify themselves with the leadership of the moment to give their support: Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh (Machir was his son), Zebulon, Issachar, they all came up to help; and then there are those who did not come. It is like a grand review, like the judgment-seat of Christ. Now the battle is over, and the conduct of everyone is being reviewed. These tribes came up to help, and are mentioned with approval. Two tribes in particular get special commendation: Zebulon and Naphtali jeoparded their lives to death in the high places of the field, verse 18. We ought to covet that in every conflict. We all have to face some kind of conflict, and if we identify ourselves with the spiritual leadership of the moment, we may do it as an ordinary soldier, or in an extraordinary way like men who earn the Victoria Cross. The difference is mentioned.

But then there are those who did not come at all. Reuben had resolves of heart, many good resolutions; he goes through great deliberations, but he abides in the sheepfolds. "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleating of the flocks? In the divisions of Reuben there were great deliberations of heart," verse 16. Sleepless nights are of no use, if they do not bring you into conflict. The Spirit of God in Deborah and Barak asks the question, Why did not you come? With all your deliberations and resolves you never came; you abode in the sheep-folds. People say sometimes, We will not meddle with conflict; we preach the gospel; we look after the sheep. It is good to look after the sheep, but, if a war is on, that is the important thing at the time.

"Gilead abode beyond Jordan." That covers Reuben, Gad and part of Manasseh; they abode beyond Jordan. That represents people who have not taken heavenly ground; they have no interest in heavenly conflict, and do not care anything about it; they stay beyond Jordan. Another is Dan, "And Dan, why did he remain in ships?" Dan remained in ships. I believe ships in Scripture

represent the commerce of the world. Here is a man who is engrossed in money-making, and he has no time to take up conflict; he remains in his ships. "Asher sat on the seashore and abode in his creeks," he just takes things comfortably. None of those tribes comes up, and they miss the spoil. If we do not come up we do not get the spoil of conflict. If I am in spiritual conflict I have no pleasure in fighting; that is not the end in view. The end in view is to gain something for oneself, something for Israel, and something for the Lord. Verses 10 and 11 show the gain: "Ye that ride on white she-asses, ye that sit on carpets, and ye that walk by the way, consider, Because of the voice of those who divide the spoil, in the midst of the places of drawing water. There they rehearse the righteous acts of Jehovah, His righteous acts toward His leaders in Israel." They got some of the spoils of the conflict. Paul says, "All who are in Asia have turned away from me," and, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present age"; he had gone down to ships. As time went on there were those who did not stand by Paul; they wanted easy times. They turned away from him and forsook him, but he gives honourable mention to some who did stand by him.

We must recognise spiritual leadership at any particular moment. If any are exercised and cry to God, God raises up a leader; that is the lesson of Judges. It is a picture of what went on in the church from the first days until now. When they felt they were in a state of departure and that the world was getting the upper hand, they cried to God, and God raised up a spiritual leader. There is a spiritual leading now, but it is not what it was at the time of the Reformation. God raised up Luther and others for spiritual leading in that day, and all overcomers identified themselves with it, but there is a spiritual lead *today* as certainly as then. When there is a falling off, God intervenes again, with *another* form of leadership against the enemy. He does not always work on the same lines.

The enemies to-day are not the same as those the saints had to deal with five hundred years ago. They are the same at the bottom, but methods are different, and we can only meet enemies to-day as we follow the spiritual leading of to-day, and identify ourselves with it. If we do not come up, we may get the curse. Meroz gets a bitter curse because he did not come up.

Then the attitude of Meroz seems to be set over against the extraordinary faithfulness of Jael. If one gets a curse, another gets a great commendation. Jael was a woman, and not of Israel. She might seem to be out of it, but her energy of faith brought her into it, and she acted in an extraordinary way against the great enemy of God's people, and destroyed the enemy's great general.

Jael established her right by this act of faith. She severed her old link in a moment. She is something like Rahab. There was a time in the history of Rahab when she severed her relations with her own tribe, with Jericho, its king and people. She formed new links with the people of God, and got a distinguished place in Israel. Jael had been identified with the king of Canaan; there was a covenant between them, but the time came when she recognised that Jabin was hostile to the people of God, and she broke her covenant of peace, and cut herself off from her old confederates, and identified herself with the people of God. She established her right to a place in Israel; she broke her league with Jabin.

The song finishes, "So let all thine enemies perish, Jehovah! But let them that love him be as the rising of the sun in its might." The destruction of Sisera was a kind of foreshadowing of the destruction of all the enemies of God, and everything hostile to the power of His people. All will be destroyed, and the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

CHAPTER 6

The enemy in this chapter is Midian, a kindred people according to nature. Nothing impoverishes more than the influence of people with whom we have something naturally in common, so that one's own relatives may be a greater snare than any others. They "destroyed the produce of the land" and "Israel was greatly impoverished." A person with whom I have tastes in common is a great danger, much more so than one with whom I have nothing in common. The object of the enemy was to deprive the people of the produce of the land. It is serious for us to lose the produce of the land. We live on that, and if we do not, we are spiritually impoverished; some Midianitish influence is robbing us. How much are we enjoying the "things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him," 1 Cor. 2: 9. That is the land, and the enemy would seek to bring us under natural influences so that we may be impoverished.

When they cried to Jehovah He sent a prophet to bring home to them that they had been disobedient. There is always the word to convict before restoration or before God intervenes to deliver. God begins with an exercised man, threshing wheat in the winepress. He is seeking to secure something of the produce of the land. The Angel tells him that Jehovah is with him, and his answer showed that he had a true sense of the position as under the governmental dealings of God. That was his might. His reply was, "Ah, Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold my thousand is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." What strikes one in Gideon is his concern to be assured that it is Jehovah, and of his own personal acceptance. It is a peace-offering for acceptance, see Leviticus 19: 5. He was personally clear of

what was evil and idolatrous; he had typically a true estimate of himself and of Christ. There was that which could be wholly accepted, and he was in accord with it.

Before the works of deliverance are wrought, the personal state of the deliverer must be adjusted with God. Gideon takes up relations with God on his own side; then Jehovah enlarges his testimony. He gives him an enlarged apprehension of Christ as the bullock of burnt-offering. This is for his father's house and for the city. The true ground of Israel's blessing was to be publicly set forth "in the ordered manner." It is "the second bullock," intimating the break-down of all connected with the first order. It is Christ in energy and maturity displacing all that is idolatrous.

Gideon is more personally interesting than any of the previous judges, because we are permitted to see his personal exercises and how he was brought into accord with the mind of Jehovah, first personally and then as giving a spiritual lead in his father's house and in the city. There are deep moral lessons here such as we have not had before; a getting back to the true basis of our relations with God. Nothing else will really displace what is idolatrous. It is remarkable that there is no sin-offering; it is rather the bringing in of what is positive as securing acceptance, so that idolatry may be completely displaced. The true ground of Israel's blessing is seen, and in the light of it Baal is seen to be worthless.

We have to watch carefully the things which appeal to us naturally. If we are going on with God, these things would never get power. If a young convert turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and wait for His Son from heaven, as the Thessalonians did, and went on in that way, he would never fall under the power of the Midianites. To fall under their power shows that we have got away from God; otherwise their influence would have no power over us.

The first part of this chapter shows Israel's public

position. The people of God generally are influenced by what they have in common with men naturally, and they have lost the enjoyment of the produce of the land. God takes up Gideon, a man personally exercised. He was concerned about the state of things; he felt it and was doing his best to save a bit of the produce of the land from the Midianites. He wanted a little food for Israel. That is the kind of man God can take up; he is presented as feeling the situation. He is a kind of Timothy. This chapter goes with Timothy. Gideon is the result of prophetic ministry; if there is a cry to God, before He can reach His people, He brings things home to their consciences. He sends a prophet. Gideon is the result of prophetic ministry; his conscience was exercised and his heart. Paul says of Timothy, "being mindful of thy tears." A man who would shed tears over the state of the church is the kind of man God can use. Here is a man feeling the state of things, but with a true desire to preserve what is of Christ. Such a one God can use; He says, "Jehovah is with thee." There was nothing outwardly to distinguish him; it looked as though he was rather cowardly, but his action morally was that of a mighty man of valour. I suppose to-day a true sense of the position of things is power. Gideon had it.

It was an extraordinary thing to thresh wheat in a winepress, and a very difficult thing to do. The winepress suggests suffering. He was prepared to suffer that the people of God might have a little of Christ as food. How much are we prepared to suffer that the people of God may have a little of Christ? These feelings are brought about morally by prophetic ministry. The prophet came, and there is conviction of the true state of things, and always with that there is a sense of what the people of God need; they need Christ—the wheat—to be made available. That is a great exercise, to feel the state of the people of God to-day, and to be greatly concerned that they should have more of Christ as food. God can work by a man like that, and give deliverance to Israel. If there are

such feelings with us, if we have shed tears, God can use us, but there are very few to weep over the condition of the assembly.

Gideon had a great sense of his own insignificance. His thousand was the smallest in Manasseh, and he the least in his father's house. Gideon's was not at all a distinguished part of the tribe; it was the poorest in Manasseh. All this brings him to realise that, if he is to have anything to do with Jehovah or Jehovah's service, it must be on the ground of Christ, and we all have to come to that. If we are to be used of God, we must get entirely away from ourselves to be with God on the ground of Christ. So he brings his peace-offering and his meat-offering. Gideon had learned, what had not come out before in Judges, something of the teaching of Leviticus, as to the peace-offering and the meat-offering and the altar; he had all these things in his soul. He had realised the break-down of everything; if we do and if we have taken any true estimate of *ourselves*, we must feel how insignificant we are. So Paul said that he was "less than the least of all saints." Everyone should feel that. If so, I can only be with God on the ground of what can be wholly acceptable to God, every bit of which can go up in holy fire to God; that is Christ. Gideon was a Timothy; he was deeply concerned about the state of things. It was personal exercise in a day of general departure, a day when Israel was impoverished. Are we going to contribute to impoverishment or enrichment? We are all doing one thing or the other, either helping to enrich or impoverish. Gideon is helping to enrich. I think that his exercise was first personal, then local, then general. First he brings his peace-offering, and meat-offering, and it is accepted; and in the light of this wonderful instruction he builds an altar; his own personal relations with God are thoroughly adjusted. That must be the first thing; it is no use for us to think of serving the people of God if our personal state and associations are wrong. At the beginning of 2 Timothy, Paul presses personal

state before he speaks about anything collective; he presses the personal character of the servant before he speaks of separation. What is the good of separation if one's personal state is not right? It is only Pharisaism.

The first exercise is to get adjusted with God, to have your altar individually, and then the Lord can enlarge the sphere of testimony, and make it influential locally. Gideon gets enlargement; he moves on from the peace-offering, which was for acceptance, to the bullock of burnt-offering. Speaking typically, he gets enlargement in his apprehension of Christ. It is a fine thing to move on from a kid to a bullock. The kid of the goats was for Gideon's own personal acceptance, but the bullock of burnt-offering would bring all Israel into view. When Gideon is right personally, Jehovah comes in to give him an enlarged sphere of service, and in order for that there must be enlarged apprehension of Christ.

It is remarkable that there is no sin-offering; that is, God is going to set aside what is idolatrous by the positive blessedness of the footing on which everything stands according to His mind. A sense of what the people of God are with Him according to the preciousness of Christ as typified in the bullock would in itself overthrow what is idolatrous. It is all seen to be worthless. If we are with God in the blessedness of the bullock of burnt-offering—the largest conceivable expression of Christ in His delightfulness to God, it puts everything idolatrous out of court at once. So Baal and the Asherah are destroyed; everything is superseded, we may say, by Christ.

"The second bullock" suggests that nothing is secured for God in connection with the first order; everything connected with the first order has broken down, but Christ comes in distinctly as "the second." He is "the second man out of heaven." He took away the first that He might establish the second. "The first" in Scripture often applies to the natural and "the second" to the spiritual—see 1 Corinthians 15. These deep moral lessons have to be

learned before there can be any warfare with the enemy. It is the preparation of the servant; he is put through the course of education to prepare him for service. We see in verse 34 that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Gideon. He blew a trumpet and certain of Israel were rallied to him.

Not only are spiritual conditions brought about in Gideon, but he learns to set great value on the sovereignty of God, and that comes out in the tokens that he desired to have from Jehovah about the fleece and the dew. That is, he wanted to be assured, not only of his personal acceptance, and of the general truth applying to Israel, the reinstatement of Christ as the ground of the relationship of the people of God with Him, but he also wished to be assured that he was moving in line with the present movements of God in sovereignty. It is important to recognise this. If Gideon had not learnt the lesson he would not have been ready to give up his army. There must be the recognition of God's sovereignty. Gideon does not rely at all on his own exercises, or the moral condition which had so far been brought about; he looks for distinct and sovereign movements of God wholly apart from what is of man. It shows the entire absence of self-confidence; he is just at the disposal of the Lord. The dew of divine sovereignty is more to him than weapons of war. It was this that prepared him to have his army reduced.

The lesson at the end of this chapter about the fleece and the dew indicated a preparedness in Gideon to move in harmony with the sovereignty of God without looking at the balance of power. Three hundred are more effective than 32,000 if moving with the sovereignty of God. He had been learning this all along, and that is what gives Gideon his true character. He is a "barley cake"; he is of no importance at all externally, but he has the features of Christ; he is princely. These beautiful features of Christ are developed in this way for us; we see the absolute subjection of Christ to the sovereignty of God. He would not move at all outside the range of divine sovereignty; so,

when the cities rejected Him, it makes Him thankful. He says, "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in thy sight," Matt. 11: 25, 26. There is the most perfect acceptance of divine sovereignty. That is what gives beauty to that verse, "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and *I* will give you rest." He invites us to come and stand alongside of Himself. He tells us where He is; He rejoices in the Father's sovereignty. Now He says, You come and stand beside Me, and I will give you rest. That is the place where rest is found.

The moral state may be there, but that does not in itself qualify one to be any help to the people of God. God will please Himself as to whom He uses, and how He uses them, and when He uses them, but then would I like to be retained for the service of God? Do I love the people of God so much that I would like to be retained? Nothing is of any value if God is not in it. Some very little thing may decide whether we are meet for the Master's use or not. John Baptist learnt this lesson; he says, "A man can receive nothing unless it be given him out of heaven," John 3: 27.

These features in Gideon were very acceptable to God; they were not the exercise of unbelief, but the exercise of faith that was patiently feeling its way. This is the exercise of a man who is patiently feeling his way; he does not wish to be rash; we often are, when we think we are right. He wants to be assured of every step.

The Lord would never move without a word. He waited for Jehovah. It is said of Him prophetically, "I waited patiently for Jehovah," Psalm 40: 1. Now Gideon waits to be fully assured that he is moving in the current of divine sovereignty, because the dew speaks of that. Micah 5 speaks of the dew as not tarrying for men, neither for the sons of men. It comes down in silent blessed power from

God; man has nothing to do with it. All the science in the world could not make one dew-drop fall on a blade of grass; it is purely of God. Gideon asked for a double test. He wanted to have adequate testimony; it was not unbelief, but the exercise of faith. He wanted a double testimony to the reality of the sovereign movements of God at that particular moment, and God answered it. It had to do with the deliverance of Israel. How was God going to move? No one could anticipate how. God might take up the most unlikely person in christendom. He chooses whom He will, and He works in such a way that, whatever He does, all the glory of it is seen to belong to Himself. If a person is not in line with God, some place is given to what is of man or of self; but, when God works, He works in such a way that all glory is His own. The beginning of the next chapter works it out in connection with Gideon's army. God says, There are too many for Me. If 32,000 get the victory, they will vaunt themselves that they have done something; so He thins them down. First of all the faint-hearted ones had to go, according to law, but still 10,000 were too many. God has to bring them down to 300. What could they do against an army of 130,000? It is entirely a question of what God can do; nothing is worth a straw but what God can do. If you come to that you get most profound peace.

If I am little enough God can take me up, and use me. Gideon retained the 300 men. Would you like to be retained? Every heart would say, Lord, retain me! If we are little enough, God will retain us. He retained Timothy, and 2 Timothy is very much a question of people retained as vessels meet for the Master's use. The only thing is to be absolutely at God's disposal. These 300 men were retained to be absolutely at God's disposal. Three hundred men at God's disposal were worth a great deal more than 32,000 that were not.

We read in verse 34 that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. This shows that something more than

moral conditions are needed; there must be the power of the Spirit of God. If we had the most perfect moral conditions, that in itself is not power; power lies in the Spirit of God. There *must* be moral conditions first; there is not anyone in the New Testament upon whom the Spirit came apart from moral conditions. The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey; we could not think of the Spirit being given to a lawless person; it is a contradiction in terms. There must be obedience; then there must be the readiness to take up the testimony of the Lord. What do we want the Spirit for? We want the Spirit, not to get through, but to be supported for Christ. The evidence of those who have the Spirit is that they are really set for Christ.

CHAPTER 7

This book shows us the principles on which God will help and deliver His people in days of departure. At every period of the church's history God has His own way of bringing in deliverance for His people. We have to be exercised to see what God's way is, so that we are not deceived by what is great and pretentious, but we learn to value what is of God.

It was carnal self-confidence when they said that only a few need go in Joshua 7. They did not take sufficient account of the power of the enemy; they were self-confident. But here it is a question of God giving deliverance in a way that was manifestly of Himself. It was "lest Israel vaunt themselves against me." God takes great pains to preserve us from vaunting ourselves. So here it is sifting things down; quality was wanted, not quantity, an important thing in a day of departure. 2 Timothy is a sifting epistle, an epistle that would reduce the available number.

The men that lapped were proved to be good soldiers; they were so in Jehovah's account. The object of 2 Timothy is to secure men who are retained as being serviceable to the Master. There is a great profession and Paul has to say that many had turned away from him. There is a kind of sifting in 2 Timothy to find vessels to honour. Paul says, Be a good soldier, one of the three hundred. The fearful element is eliminated: "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion," 2 Tim. 1: 7. If there is not courage, we shall not maintain anything for God, but give way to the influence of the moment. The people of God protest, but give way. The lack at the present moment is that there is no moral courage to stand for what is of God.

In the previous chapter it is more the personal exercise of Gideon, but now it is a question of the kind of instruments God can use. God will not use anything that will bring glory on what He uses; He will keep the glory for Himself. There is a great lust for numbers among the people of God. Numbers do not always mean unity; the greater the number, often the less the unity. We had better have three hundred of one mind, joined in soul, and all minding and speaking the same thing, than 32,000 that are so many men, and so many minds.

If we want to be chosen and retained, we must be very particular as to how we do small things, things that seem to be trifling. Let each pray, Lord, retain me for service. Paul says to Timothy, "Take thy share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." What is personal must precede what is collective. It was apparently a very simple thing to be brought down to the water to drink, but it was a divine test, and none of us knows when we are going to be tested. It makes it very solemn how we go on through the details of everyday life. Something may come to light, in the way I do the small details of my personal or home life, that disqualifies me to be retained for service in any special way; and in connection with small things some

feature may come to light which God approves for His service. You may see a person retained for service; we can often recognise those who are so retained, but we do not know the secret. Perhaps in some small ordinary matter they have acted for the Lord, and He says, I will retain you for My service. There are vessels for honour, meet for the Master's use, retained for service. One would covet to be retained for service so that one could serve Israel, and could serve in a definite and effective manner.

They had to drink; it was a necessity, but they just picked it up in their hands and lapped it; there was no taking it easy, no indulgence. It was a small thing, but it has come to me that any of us may be tested constantly in little things, and, if we do not do little things in a way pleasing to God, we shall not be retained for service; we shall be dishonoured. It is not a question of whether we are Christians, but we shall not be retained. The question is, Does the Lord approve me? I do not approve myself; the apostle says that it is not the one who commends himself, but whom the Lord approves. What is the use of my commending myself to the brethren, if the Lord does not commend me to the brethren? I am simply nothing, and, if the Lord does not commend me to the brethren, I cannot serve them.

In divine movements it is a great thing to be confirmed. God delights not only to guide, but He takes pains to confirm His people, so He sends Gideon down to the camp to hear the dream and the interpretation. Not only was Gideon's hand strengthened, but he was made a worshipper. The worshipper alone is a true warrior. It is a fine thing to get this dream and the interpretation; it would make us all worshippers.

By the cake of barley bread Gideon would learn his own littleness. Gideon was a true cake of barley bread at the beginning; he says, "I am the least in my father's house." He has small thoughts of himself; that is power. Have we accepted the fact that Christ was crucified through

weakness? That is the power of God. "The weakness of God is stronger than men," 1 Cor. 1: 25. It is wonderful that God should set Himself forth in such a statement. God has taken the way of utter weakness. Nothing could be weaker than a dead man; as long as a man is alive there is some strength, but when a man is dead there is utter weakness. Now God says, That is My power. We are slow to take it in and accept it. The cake of barley bread sets forth the utter weakness and insignificance of what God takes up, and if we are to be of any service in Israel we have to come to it that God takes up weak things, ignoble things, despised things, and foolish things, and things that are not. Are we prepared to be taken up in that character? If not, God will not take us up at all.

In the consciousness of that we worship, and that will fit us for conflict. Worship means that I have entirely done with myself; God alone is before me. There is no worship until God is the exclusive Object of the heart. I may only be sustained for a few minutes, but when I worship there is nothing present to my soul but God. That is power; there is nothing so powerful as worship. The creature filled with God is a creature filled with power. The apostle dwells on it with great assurance. "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling," 1 Cor. 2: 3. These are not figures of speech; I believe the apostle went about his service actually trembling. I am often glad when I see a brother trembling when he gets up to speak. I think, The saints will now get something. I believe this chapter is the Old Testament version of 2 Corinthians 4. Earthen vessels indicate in a striking figure the kind of instruments that God delights to use. How little one has been impressed by the fact that weakness is really power!

Barley sets forth Christ in all the lowliness and outward weakness in which He was found here; He had no resources in Himself. Here it is rather a figure of the saints than of Christ, that we have to be prepared to take

the place of being of no account. Paul learned to glory in being a cake of barley bread; he lived to learn to glory in his weakness. Paul had to go through a great deal of discipline and he learned experimentally in his service that weakness and fear and much trembling attached to him. Then he learned it under the discipline of God; he had a thorn for the flesh, which was an additional help to him, so he had nothing at any time but the consciousness of weakness. Then he was thrown into prison; he had no chance of preaching; he was circumscribed in every way, and the power of God never came out in him in such a way as it did after he was in prison. He learned the secret of "when I am weak, then I am powerful," 2 Cor. 12: 10. He was in the spirit of worship like Gideon—"he worshipped." It is wonderful to be made to realise one's own weakness, and only to have a feeling of worship. We see it in type in Gideon, but we see it in personal experience in Paul.

When we come to battle, the weapons of warfare are not carnal. There is a trumpet and a torch and a vessel here; in actual battle there is a trumpet, a torch and a *broken vessel*. The trumpet suggests the testimony rendered, as Paul says, "we also believe, therefore also we speak," 2 Cor. 4: 13. If we can bring in what is of God, that defeats the enemy, in whatever shape he may be found. I suppose power lies always in divine testimony; power is the setting forth of what is of God. Nothing delivers from what is *not* of God except bringing in what *is* of God.

The torch would answer to God shining in the heart of a man for the shining forth of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. That is the torch, the light. Paul says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels"—it is the light in the earthen vessel, but then the breaking of the vessel is needed. It comes out in Corinthians in the way that the vessel is subjected to the most severe discipline. The vessel is brought into correspondence with the death of Jesus. It is the light that is the treasure; He has

shone in our hearts for the shining forth. The light shines in to shine out, and we have it in earthen vessels. I have no doubt that this chapter was in Paul's mind. The excellency of the power is from God, and not from us. "Every way afflicted"—that is the vessel—"but not straitened," that is the power of God. "Seeing no apparent issue"—that is the vessel—"but our way not entirely shut up," that is the power of God to keep the way open. "Persecuted"—that is the vessel—"but not abandoned," for God is there. "Cast down"—that is the vessel—"but not destroyed"; there is the power. As to the vessel there is nothing but the experience of affliction; all this is like the breaking of the vessel. So the light shines out. If what is of God shines out, it efficiently and completely overthrows what is of the enemy.

What marks the vessel is not strength but weakness. It is an earthen and broken vessel. The servant must come into harmony with the dying of Jesus, and it is bearing it in our bodies. The dying of Jesus is the breaking of the golden bowl. All the blessedness of what God is came out through the breaking of the golden bowl. In the dying of Jesus we see a divine Vessel; but then all in that Vessel only became available to men through His dying. That is the secret. Now are we prepared to be in harmony with that? That is the way of power. The great exercise with us now is that the life of Jesus should be manifested. The life of Jesus is love in activity. If that is to come out in me, it means death to all that I am naturally; that is the way of power. None of us likes it naturally, but it is the way of power.

Gideon says, "Look on me, and do likewise." That is the true power of a leader; he not only tells us what to do, but he exemplifies it himself. That is a true leader; the apostles could say, "Look on us," Acts 3: 5. The blowing of the trumpets is the sounding forth of the testimony of God. "We also believe, therefore also we speak." The trumpet sounded very loudly from Paul. Nothing more

was needed to be done; the enemy was destroyed.

This chapter shows confidence in God in contrast to confidence in the flesh, and the willingness to be reduced so that glory may all belong to God. That is a very important principle. When the trumpet has sounded it speaks only of God; it is what is of God, brought into evidence. That does its work. The apostle tells us that the weapons he used were powerful through God for casting down strongholds.

In the sovereignty of God He will retain those whom He will for His service. We have to recognise that it is a matter of sovereignty, but that does not shut out desire on our part, so that we can have exercise and desire to be retained for service. When God takes up a person sovereignly, it will be found that there are moral features in that person suitable to God. It is like the "vessels to honour," gold and silver vessels. When God puts honour on a vessel there will be found suitable moral features. God has not provided for His own dishonour. The thing is to be serviceable, to be ready: we might not be used necessarily, but am I ready to be used? In the sovereignty of God I might not be used in His service, but am I ready? I have seen it illustrated in works where it is necessary that things should go on; there are two engines, and one apparently does nothing, but in case of emergency it is ready. It is a great thing for us to be ready; so, if the Lord wants a vessel, we are just where He can use us, and we are in a condition to be used. The three hundred represent vessels ready for the Master's use; they are retained for service.

CHAPTER 8

It is not always enough to get a signal victory over the enemies, for other testings come along. If we have found the secret of victory we are tested whether we are

ourselves in the good of it. We find here that the men of Ephraim were not happy about the way things had been done. These brethren did not recognise the great principle which had so much to do with the victory—the principle of sovereignty. They felt they had been overlooked or passed by. We have to be prepared for that. The Lord works by whomsoever He will, and we have all to be prepared to be overlooked; it is a real test.

Gideon took a lowly place in meeting what was really self-importance. The way to meet self-importance is to exhibit the opposite spirit. Gideon meets it by making much of what they had done, and little of what he had done. The spirit he showed was the divine corrective of the spirit that marked the men of Ephraim. They had taken two princes, and Gideon makes the most of what they had done. We should always go on that line; not to minimise, but to make the most of what the brethren do. Paul says to the Philippians: "regarding not each his own qualities, but each those of others also," Phil. 2: 4. We take account of all that is good in the brethren. If we all moved on this line, the self-importance would die a natural death. J.N.D. was a wonderful example of this; he always spoke as if he admired and envied the gift of an evangelist; and in describing his own labours he felt he was only a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. That is the right spirit. If you can only serve, you do not want any importance. Gideon says, I have done nothing; your gleanings are better than my vintage. So he won the brethren. It is just as important to win the brethren as to defeat the enemy. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city"; if you can win an offended brother, you have done more than great military exploits.

Gideon still goes on with his three hundred men, though they were faint. Then he gets another test by brethren of even a worse character than the men of Ephraim, that is, the men of Succoth; and at Penuel he finds Israelites with no interest in what is going on. They were quite neutral;

they were totally unsympathetic with those fighting the Lord's battles. That is another test. Are we prepared to go on in spite of that?

Gideon had a right to count on sympathy and support; they were Israelites, and his men were faint and weary; but he finds a total lack of sympathy. Nothing is more trying to the spirit than to be engaged in the Lord's battles and to find no support from those who profess to be His people. Such represent people who look at what is going on in connection with the Lord's interests in a natural way, and, one might say, prudentially—thinking that there was little chance that 300 men, faint and weary against 15,000, would come back victorious. If we look at divine things in that way we shall be entirely unsympathetic with everything God is doing. The question was not whether they were faint and weary, or whether there were 300 against 15,000, but the only question was, Is Jehovah with those three hundred men? They did not take any account of where the Lord was. In times of conflict there are a great many who look at things from just a prudential point of view; they do not consider where the Lord is, so they miss their opportunity, and they come under the Lord's retributive ways. A solemn retribution comes on these people. The Lord never gives up His retributive rights. The Lord has a right to serve out to people what they deserve, and He retains that right. The New Testament is full of it. Paul says, "I have declared . . . that if I come again I will not spare," 2 Cor. 13: 2. That is the principle of retribution. If people fail the Lord in a crisis, they suffer for it. John says, in speaking of Diotrephes, "if I come I will bring to remembrance his works," 3 John 10. He holds the rod over Diotrephes; he does not say what he will do. I have no doubt that the coming of Paul to the Corinthians, and the coming of John to Diotrephes, were a kind of anticipation of the Lord's coming. The Lord would come representatively, and when the Lord comes He will give to everybody what

they deserve; there is no mistake.

There is a great principle brought out in connection with all these things. The men of Succoth are not quite in the place of Zebah and Zalmunna, who represent antichristian opposition, and the power of antichrist. There is a power that would destroy the features of Christ, and these two kings of Midian represent that. They had killed all Gideon's brethren. That is positively antichristian. In Zebah and Zalmunna we see a deadly, murderous hatred of what is of Christ, and that is antichrist. There is a power that is against everything that is like Christ. They represent such influences as the religious world is full of to-day. John could say, "even now there have come many antichrists," 1 John 2: 18. He said it at that time, when Christianity was not more than sixty or seventy years old. There is that working that is in deadly opposition to Christ, and all the features of Christ. We ought to be concerned lest we exhibit these features.

Succoth and Penuel were not sympathetic with the testimony of the Lord. Gideon and his men represent those who are maintaining the testimony of the Lord in the face of tremendous odds. It is a great thing to be sympathetic; if we cannot do much fighting we can be sympathetic. These things show the kind of testing and conditions that we shall sooner or later come up against, and if we can move through these things with God it will be very good for us. It is those who are seeking to maintain for God who come up against these things.

We must not let a one-sided notion of grace predominate over everything else. We must hold the balance between divine grace and divine government. We are tested, not only by what we do, but by what we do not do. These people did not do anything actually against Gideon, but they became guilty on account of what they did not do. They did not give their support to what was of God at the moment. There are those who fail in that

way; they wait to see how things are going to turn out. These people said, If you had got the victory, that would be another matter; we will wait and see how things are going to turn out. They looked at things prudentially; there was no vision of faith. Gideon's men were "faint, yet pursuing"; they did not give in because they were faint. It is faint people that can do wonders: "He giveth power to the faint," Isa. 40: 29. It is very serious to have bread—something that can support the present needs of the testimony of the Lord—and to withhold it. We are sure to come under retributive dealings.

Then Gideon gets another test. They say, "Rule over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also." They would set him up as head of a royal line; they would make a great man of him. Gideon appears in the character of an overcomer until the last stage of his history, and then he fails, and that makes it very solemn for us, especially for those who have gone through a certain amount of testing and come through it, through the mercy of God, perhaps more or less faithfully. Here is a man who is an overcomer; he walks worthily of the Lord to all pleasing up to a certain point, and then he breaks down. He had shown such a beautiful spirit; he would not rule over them, but said, "Jehovah will rule over you." He kept his place as a servant, as a vessel chosen for service, but, immediately after, another test comes along, internal, not external. It is one thing to overcome an external test, and quite another to overcome an internal test—something springing up in one's own heart. The desire to have the Midianitish earrings and ornaments sprang up in his own heart. He said, "I would desire a request of you"; and they said, "We will willingly give." It is something that springs up in his own heart now—an imitation of what is divine. It is a man who has been a great success as a leader, and he fails on the priestly side; so he desires and constructs an imitation of the priestly ephod of Exodus 28.

Gideon is like many of those who have been much used

for the deliverance of the people of God all through the history of the church. Many who have been extraordinarily used have failed in what is priestly; they have brought worldly elements into the service of God. It is remarkable that this failure begins at the top; it begins with the leader. It is a warning not to commit yourself absolutely to any leader. A man may be divinely and spiritually a leader up to a certain point, and then he may entirely miss what is suitable to God at the moment. We have seen men marvellously helped up to a certain point and then there may be some kind of assumption. It is a very solemn thing to make an ephod; it represented the priestly thought in Israel. The ephod as an object was nothing; the value of the ephod was dependent on the person who wore it. An ephod without a priest was simply the form of godliness without the power of it, and that is what christendom has fallen into, and largely under the influence of men who have been wonderfully blessed and used of God.

The preservative is to cultivate a deep sense of the spiritual character of approach to God; otherwise we may have the marks of what is Midianitish. There is nothing living about it. An ephod without a priest is a most solemn thing; it is but an outward form of what is priestly. Gideon in a certain sense prepared the way by his ephod for what was idolatrous; he put it there in his city, and they went after it. It really had an idolatrous character. The priestly idea was all perverted. So, as soon as Gideon died, they were ready for positive idolatry, and it is solemn that so much of what is idolatrous has developed from men who laboured for the deliverance of Israel. They have perpetuated things in the public profession that are idolatrous in character, and not spiritual at all. They have been great as leaders, but they have failed as priests.

In the Reformation there was a great deal secured for man; it was a divine deliverance, but it did not secure much in a priestly way for God. It led to the setting up of what is Midianitish in a permanent form in the midst

of Israel. We should be always watching against what is Midianitish being set up among us. It is one thing to be used of God for the deliverance of His people and the public defeat of the enemy, but quite another to consider for God. We can be supported by God in a wonderful way in service, and even after that fail to consider for God. If Gideon had considered for God he would never have thought of this ephod; it would never have come into his heart. The only man who is carried through safely is the one who always considers for God. The apostles all went right through; they did not break down, because they considered for God, and never a thought arose in their minds of substituting what was natural for what was spiritual. The moment of victory becomes the test. As long as we have to face the enemy we are kept on our knees in dependence, but when the enemy is defeated for the moment, and things are relaxed, we are off our guard and we rest on our oars. These things are very exercising; they show the elements which we have to deal with, and they show us the secret of power, and the secret of departure and decline. There are certain features in Gideon which can be viewed as typical of Christ, but in a general way he represents a leader raised up of God amongst His people, marked by certain features of God; but he is liable to be betrayed in things not of God. In all things God is to be glorified. "To him be glory in the assembly," Eph. 3: 21. Glory all belongs to God. If we kept that before us, we should never make a Midianitish ephod.

CHAPTER 9

Abimelech is not presented to us as one who delivered Israel, but as representing a principle that has been very much in evidence among the people of God. Like Diotrephes in the New Testament, he seems to be governed by the one desire to be prominent and to rule.

He entirely lacked the brotherly spirit; he was so lacking in it that he slew all his brethren. We do not see in Abimelech a single spiritual feature from the beginning of his course to the end; so he is a warning rather than an example.

He is a great contrast to Gideon. Gideon in the main was marked by spiritual features; he failed at the end of his course, which is a solemn warning to us. But in the main he was marked by spiritual features, just the opposite to Abimelech; Gideon would not rule over Israel; he was small in his own eyes, and least in his father's house. He was consciously small and not wanting prominence. He only accepted the place of deliverer because it was thrust on him in the sovereignty of God.

Abimelech's origin resulted from an unspiritual connection on the part of Gideon. It is often Satan's way of working. Gideon had formed a connection that was not spiritual, like Abraham taking Hagar, and the result is that something comes in contrary to the mind of God.

Shechem had good features as well as bad. It is the place where Jacob buried his false gods. It is solemn to think that a place that had such good features should come to be marked by idolatry, and the setting up of a man like Abimelech to be king. It was the place of decision, where Joshua and the people made a covenant. So it is most solemn that this is the place where Baal-berith, meaning *lord of covenant*, was set up; it was a terrible imitation of what God is.

We do not see a single divine or spiritual feature in Abimelech. He comes in as a place-seeker, and a power-seeker, and he is prepared to sacrifice and destroy anything that would hinder his getting a place. The result is nothing but contention and trouble, and it ends in Abimelech destroying the people, and the people destroying him. It ends in a terrible way in the government of God. That has often happened in the history of the people of God—men seeking a place, and that is largely the cause

of the confusion and departure from God which has marked the Christian profession. The great value of this chapter is that God points out to us what will deliver us entirely from that spirit. Seeking place, prominence, rule and power—that spirit is worthless for God. It is the bramble bush, and it bears no fruit that is acceptable to God. But in contrast to that we have wonderful instruction in what has value, and will deliver us from being brambles. None of us want to be brambles, but to escape we must be olive trees, fig trees and vines.

Jotham represents the faithful remnant. He was the last survivor of Gideon's sons; he could give a clear and decided testimony against dominant evil. The men of Shechem had no regard for Jehovah or for Gideon. Abimelech does not present himself to them as the son of Gideon, but "as your bone, and your flesh"; he took character from his mother, just as Ishmael did. We very soon forget what God has done for us. "The children of Israel remembered not Jehovah their God, who had delivered them out of the hand of all their enemies on every side. And they showed no kindness to the house of Jerubbaal-Gideon, according to all the good that he had done to Israel," chap. 8: 34, 35.

The three trees—olive, fig and vine—are very often used in Scripture as representing God's fruitful people; they represent the features that God would have mark the saints. In Romans the olive represents the promises which had been given to Abraham. It represents the saints as deriving everything from God. God is the source of everything; that is the thought in the olive tree. The plain instruction is that it is not trees that have any value that want to reign, but worthless trees, the bramble, the thorn-bush. If I want to be somebody amongst the brethren, it only proves I am a bramble. It is well to take that to heart. We are to have the features of the olive, the fig, and the vine; if we had, it would never come into our minds to want the place of rule, or prominence amongst

the people of God. It is too far beneath us; it might do for the bramble, but not for the olive, the fig, or the vine; they cannot come down to such degradation as that. All three trees are standing figures of fruitfulness.

The thought of the olive is deriving all from God. The psalmist says, "But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I will confide in the lovingkindness of God for ever and ever," Psalm 52: 8. The olive tree planted in the house of God would derive everything from God, and it flourishes. The saint who is an olive tree trusts in the lovingkindness of God *for ever*; he derives everything from God. To such a one a place of prominence or rule would be beneath him. If you are on the line of deriving from God, the measure of what you have surpasses everything you could mark out for yourself. It would surpass the most wonderful position you could ever have. A simple believer who is drawing all from God Himself, and is enjoying the fatness that is the substance of divine promise in the power of the Holy Spirit, could not entertain for a moment the thought of changing places with any other, however exalted he might be. It would be a degradation, not an exaltation. The olive is too fat to come down to it. It searches us out, because the devil does not always offer us big things, but he may lead us to desire some sort of place in a small way.

The fulness of the blessing which God has conferred on us in Christ Jesus would take all the conceit out of us. There is nothing to aspire to, there is nothing greater than what I have. That is the wonderful place in which the saint is put; he has nothing to aspire to, he has what is greater than the whole world. He has fatness—all the fatness of God's house. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou wilt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures," Psalm 36: 8. What is there for a man who is abundantly satisfied? There is nothing to offer him. Paul spoke of "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord," Phil. 3: 8. He had

the best thing possible. Where is the saint who would like to be a worldly king? There is not a saint on earth but would shrink from it. But how easy it is to want some place amongst the brethren! Many a man has come to grief on that line.

Jotham's parable shows how God would set His people up in superiority to every form of ambition. The olive tree would represent the spiritual man; he only can enjoy the blessing of God. It is said in Romans 11 that the root is holy, because it is of promise; it is altogether of God. If the root is holy, the branches must be. There is nothing more holy than the presence of the Spirit in the saints; that is what makes the saints holy persons.

The spirit of service would correct the desire to be great. The Lord says, "I am in the midst of you as the one that serves," Luke 22: 27. It should be a great desire with every one of us to serve the brethren, to yield some oil for the brethren. If I could render the brethren some little service, that is something. If I could yield something spiritual to the brethren it would be a great gratification; but ruling over them is just the opposite. The olive yields that which honours God and men. It does not honour self. If we are olive trees we shall honour God and the brethren; we shall think highly of the brethren, and never think that we are superior to them. The olive tree says, "By me they honour God and man." If God gets His place, the brethren will have their place of honour too. It is yielding something; the olive yields, the fig yields, the vine yields. The question is, What am *I* yielding for the good of the brethren? It is good when a brother comes along and ministers, and you can see the saints' faces shine. He is an olive tree; that is the kind of man to imitate. The question is, What are the brethren getting out of me? not, How can I get my way? This spirit is the opposite to the Abimelech spirit, of which christendon is so full. A great deal of the present state of christendom is the result of man wanting a place. The first coming in of it was with

Ananias and his wife; they wanted a place among the brethren so as to be thought highly of as devoted people; they told a lie to the Holy Spirit to get a place. Then Simon Magus wanted to buy the power to give the Holy Spirit; he offered money; he wanted a place.

Jotham represents the remnant who are in the secret of God and of what has true value with God. It was not possible for him to come out as a rival to Abimelech; he did not think of such a thing. If a man desires to have a place, he always finds the place he desires, but he always ends at the bottom; he gets his skull fractured sooner or later. Jotham indicates the line of blessing on which God can hear us; it is striking that he says, "Hearken to me . . . that God may hearken to you." This parable of Jotham is the secret of being heard of God. If we are not heard of God we shall not be worth anything; we shall only be brambles.

The fig-tree in Scripture comes in on the line of righteousness. Adam and Eve made themselves aprons of fig-leaves to cover themselves; in the language of the type, they attempted to establish their own righteousness. There was no real fruit there, but pretentious leaves. The fig-tree represents Israel as that from which God expected the fruit of righteousness; He expected what was right. The olive-tree rather represents what is spiritual; the fig-tree more what is moral on the line of righteousness. The olive tree represents the saints drawing from God the infinite and everlasting wealth of divine good, filled with fatness flowing thus from the fulness of God Himself, all spiritual enjoyment being in the Holy Spirit. The saint who is conscious of that would consider a position of rule, reigning over the brethren, far beneath him.

Nathaniel under the fig-tree had been recognising his own lack of righteous feelings; he had been confessing his own state, and there was no guile left in him; so he was a true Israelite, a true fig-tree himself.

In Jeremiah 24 we read of good and bad figs. The bad figs were those who would not submit to the government of God; there were very good and very bad, naughty figs, so vile that they could not be eaten. The good were those who had gone to Babylon; they had submitted to the righteous government of God. The others, who remained in Jerusalem and stuck to the place of privilege and pretension, were vile figs.

The fig-tree has sweetness and good fruit. It sets forth the moral line rather than the spiritual. The spiritual has to do with what a man is inwardly, but the fig-tree brings into evidence the moral character and course which the saint follows, and Paul says to the Philippians, "being complete as regards the fruit of righteousness which is by Jesus Christ, to God's glory and praise," Phil. 1: 11. That is the line of the fig-tree. In Hebrews 12 we read of the "peaceable fruit of righteousness." Righteousness always makes for peace. Why leave the beautiful characteristics of which the epistle to the Philippians speaks, to want to be exalted and think oneself better than one's brethren? My happiness consists in thinking better of the brethren than of myself.

I think that everything is exemplified in the Lord. He is the pattern of the olive tree, the fig-tree, and the vine. He does not appropriate the two former titles, but He says, "I am the true vine," John 15: 1. He was really the true olive and fig-tree also. He has a right to rule, and He rules in a day when God has His rights. The question is, Do I want to rule now when neither God nor Christ have their rights? Paul says to the Corinthians, *You* are reigning as kings, but *we* are debased to the lowest possible point—"the offscouring of the world," 1 Cor. 4: 13.

Then the vine clearly speaks of joy—"wine which gladdeneth the heart of men," Psalm 104: 15. Here it is, "should I leave my new wine, which cheers God and man, and go to wave over the trees?" It is connected with joy. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace," Gal. 5: 22.

There is nothing more to be lamented than the absence of joy among the people of God; they are not choice vines. God wants His people not only to be vines, but choice vines. If so, we shall have joy ourselves and make others happy. Eternal life involves fulness of joy. John says, after speaking of eternal life, "these things write we to you that your joy may be full," 1 John 1: 4. I have a very feeble idea of how necessary it is to the joy of God that I should be happy.

The Lord said, "I will no more drink at all of the fruit of the vine until . . . I drink it new in the kingdom of God," Mark 14: 25. The Lord had spiritual joy of an earthly character in the company of His saints on earth. It was a great joy to Him to have a few hearts around Him who could appreciate Him and give evidence of being characterised by the Father's teaching, but all that was to be broken up by His death, and He would not resume any earthly joy of that character until He renewed it again in the kingdom, when God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. He had a little taste of it beforehand in the company of His disciples. He had His children: "Behold, I and the children which God has given me," Heb. 2: 13. The Lord had a profound joy in the company of His saints, but then His death came in; the Shepherd was smitten, and the flock scattered; all came to an end, but He says that He will have it again in the kingdom of God.

Gaius, in John's third epistle, was a very good example of these trees. He was yielding joy for the brethren, in contrast to the dreadful spirit seen in Diotrephes, which has been the blight and curse of christendom. We are all in danger of this spirit, and Jotham's parable is intended to affect us, so that in contrast we are concerned about yielding pleasure for God and man, as portrayed in the olive, the fig-tree and the vine.

CHAPTERS 10, 11 & 12

The history of Abimelech shows the spirit that has wrought such havoc amongst the people of God—men without the knowledge of God seeking place and prominence. It leads only to strife and contention and destruction; it is a warning for us.

In Jephthah we see a man with true faith; he is mentioned among the worthies in Hebrews 11 and has the power of the Spirit with him, but he is not what we should call a spiritual man.

The general state of things in Israel now was apparently much worse. "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baals, and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook Jehovah, and served him not," chap. 10: 6. It seems to be a more general departure than before, so that the chastisement of God is more severe. In verse 8 it says that the children of Ammon "oppressed and crushed the children of Israel." No such language had been used before. Then in verse 9 we read that "Israel was greatly distressed"; and at the end of verse 16 there is a most touching word: "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." Jehovah's soul was grieved for the misery of His people. It would seem to answer to the dark ages of christendom. In chapter 10 very little of the light of God seems to remain amongst God's people; but there is repentance in verse 10: "And the children of Israel cried to Jehovah saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served the Baals." There is a crying to God and a confession, but God does not answer in the way of deliverance. He says, "Go and cry to the gods that ye have chosen; let them save you in the time of your trouble." The condition is so

serious that God has, as it were, to hold aloof from His people. This leads them into deeper exercise, so that in verse 16 we read, "And they put away the strange gods from among them and served Jehovah." There is a returning to Jehovah and confession, and then deliverance comes in by Jephthah, but it seems to be on a lower ground than with Gideon. There is no appearing of Jehovah, no divine appointment. Jephthah comes to the front simply by the necessity of the case; he is not brought forward by the direct call or appointment of Jehovah, but the people are driven to fetch him by their necessities. It seems as if God would humble His people even by the character of the deliverer He used; He humbles them by driving them to have recourse to one who had been hated and expelled as an illegitimate son, a man with no status at all. There is a humbling character about the very deliverer that God was pleased to use.

Jephthah represents men whom God has used to deliver His people, but who are not spiritual men; men who have had faith to do what was needed in the necessities of the time, and who had the power of the Spirit to do it, but yet were not spiritual. To have the power of the Spirit does not make a man spiritual; he may still do things which are not according to the mind of God.

We see a different character of things in Samson; he is the last of the judges, and he presents the features that suit the last times, but I think Jephthah more answers to the Reformation time, when God was pleased to give faith and power to men who were not always spiritual, but who were suitable vessels for God to use to deliver His people. The very fact that they were not spiritual left its mark on all they did. God may use and bring forward men providentially to deliver His people who have not the features of spirituality. The fighting here is on the wilderness side of Jordan; that is the territory the enemy was trying to seize. It represents the kind of fighting there was at the time of the Reformation, when the effort of the

enemy was to rob souls of the blessing that belonged to the wilderness side of Jordan. Could a man be separate from the world, be justified by faith, and have the Spirit, so that the moral beauty of Christ could come out in him? That was the battle at the time of the Reformation; the enemy tried to rob them of all that had been given to them in Balaam's parables. Men at the time of the Reformation were not characterised very much by spirituality; there was faith there, and power there, but not always spirituality; therefore it left its mark on the Christian profession to this day. If we are not spiritual, though we may have faith, and the power of the Spirit of God, we shall be open to all kinds of assaults of the enemy.

The Ammonite wanted to possess the territory that should be held for Jehovah. Moab and Ammon represent the result of the people of God being led by sight and not by faith; they are the children of Lot. Lot really gave up the path of faith. It was not that he was not a believer; he was a righteous man, but he gave up the path of faith. If there is an element admitted that is not of God, it leaves its mark. Even if there is a great and honoured servant, if there is something there not of a spiritual character, it leaves its mark on all that is the fruit of that servant's labour. Jephthah recognises Jehovah; he spake all his words before Jehovah, and we are told that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him. But he was not content with that; it would have been well if he had let that suffice, but he made an unspiritual vow. The vow spoiled the victory for Jephthah.

Jephthah's vow was not a true vow; it was a bargain. There is a great difference between a vow and a bargain. Hannah's vow was a spiritual vow. She said, "O Jehovah of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thy handmaid, but wilt give unto thy handmaid a man child, then I will give him to Jehovah all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head," 1 Sam. 1: 11. She

wanted something for Jehovah. But Jephthah's was a bargain, and it was unnecessary, because, if the Spirit of Jehovah was on him, he needed nothing more; he did not need a vow. A spiritual vow must be an intelligent vow. Jephthah's was not intelligent, because he did not know what he was doing when he made it, and there was nothing for God in that. It was the fervour and zeal of an unspiritual nature, and it only brought sorrow and trouble. He said, so to speak, If you give me victory, I will do something. Deuteronomy speaks of choice vows; it supposes the people of God are so filled up with the blessing of God and the love of God that they want to give some of it to Him. The true thought of a vow is that we are so enriched that we should like to come out in a special way for God. So the Lord Himself speaks prophetically of His vows: "Thy vows are upon me, O God," Psalm 56: 12. His vows were intelligent vows; He knew all that was involved in them. Jephthah did not know what was involved in this vow; therefore it was not a spiritual vow. The Lord knew His vows involved the offering up of Himself as a burnt-offering, and He never shrank back or repented of it; He went right through with it. He made His vow when He said, "Lo, I come to do thy will," Heb. 10: 9. He dedicated Himself to the will of God, and that meant the offering up of Himself as a burnt-offering, and not someone else.

We have Paul's vow at Corinth: "having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow," Acts 18: 18. He finished his vow just as he left Corinth; that shows it was taken or carried out while he was in Corinth. I believe that when Paul went into that idolatrous, licentious, and proud city, full of intellectual glory, he felt that he must be specially for God in that place, and he took a vow. He met all the condition of the city by a special devotedness to God and to Christ.

We have all the instruction about vows in the Old Testament. We do not have the thing in terms in the New

Testament, but we have the spirit and the principle of it. The principle of a vow is that one is devoted in some special way to the Lord. But Jephthah's vow is a warning; it is a vow of an unspiritual man; he little knew what it would cost him, and it was a sorrowful man with garments rent who realised what his vow meant.

The solemn thing in Scripture is that God seems to hold people to their vows. It is said, "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay," Eccles. 5: 5. So it says, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God," Eccles. 5: 2. When anything is uttered in the nature of a vow, God seems to hold His people to it. Jephthah found no way of escape from his vow.

We see much that is a warning in Jephthah's history. The closing incident in his history is seen in chapter 12, where the men of Ephraim come and complain that they are left out. These men of Ephraim seem to be touchy brethren; they are always ready to complain if they are left out. Gideon knew how to conciliate them; he got the victory over them on the line of the Spirit of Christ, but Jephthah killed 42,000 of them. It was not a spiritual thing for Israel to be fighting with Israel; it was the first time such a thing had happened in Scripture. It is not spiritual for the brethren to be fighting and killing one another. Jephthah lacked the conciliating spirit that we see in Gideon, who met their jealousy and complaints by saying, I have done nothing; you have done great things. He conciliates them and gets the victory. Ephraim was wrong in finding fault with Jephthah, and threatening to burn his house, but Jephthah was just as wrong in going to war with them; it was a terrible spectacle.

These incidents emphasise the difference between what might be called the external aspect of the Spirit, and the internal aspect of the Spirit. Jephthah represents a man who was in the power of the external aspect of the Spirit, but not in the good of the internal. The Spirit of God can

come upon any man; He came on Balaam and on Saul. But what marks truly spiritual persons is that they have not only the Spirit on them for power, but they have the Spirit of Christ in them to give them new sensibilities and feelings inwardly. That is what Jephthah lacked. The Lord speaks in Luke 24 of the disciples being "clothed with power from on high," verse 49. That is external. In Acts 2 it is said, "there appeared to them parted tongues, as of fire, and it sat upon each one of them." That is external. The Spirit came on them for power, but in John 20 it is different: "He breathed into them, and says to them, Receive the Holy Spirit." Now they are to be spiritual. A man with the inbreathing of the Spirit would never kill the brethren. The prophets were a great contrast to such as Balaam and Saul—the power of the Spirit of Christ rested on these, but it says of the prophets that the Spirit of God was *in* them. They were intensely spiritual men, marked by the most intense affection for the people of God, and characterised by readiness to suffer for them. They were marked by suffering love. That was inside. That spirit will never make rash vows, and will never slay the brethren.

Jephthah was a genuine man. There was a true recognition of Jehovah with him, and yet what he did was a perpetual sorrow in Israel. The virgins kept up a memorial of it for ever. Then the 42,000 men of Ephraim whom he slew left a permanent gap in Israel. Israel had to suffer for all time because this man was not spiritual—a man of faith and power, but not a spiritual man. It is a solemn warning.

CHAPTER 13

It is a comfort to read a chapter in the Judges where all the actings are of God. In this chapter we have the great principles on which power would come in for the salvation

of the people of God in the last days: that is, all is viewed in this chapter from the divine side. As we go on with the history of Samson we may see a mixture, but in this chapter there is no mixture—all things are of God. The conditions are indicated to us on which divine power will come in to save the people of God at the end. Samson was the last judge; and he represents the last intervention of God in the deliverance of His people before the kingdom is publicly set up.

The principle of sovereignty comes out here, for Samson was taken out of the tribe of Dan. The tribe of Dan does not appear in Scripture in a very illustrious light, but in sovereignty the movement begins there. It is of interest too that the Philistines are the adverse power; they have appeared before in the book, but not at all prominently. It is said in chapter 15, "Samson judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years." The Philistines are not among the seven wicked nations of Canaan that God had pledged Himself to dispossess, so they represent something different. They seem to represent people who are outwardly in a position that corresponds with what God has given His people. They had come up out of Egypt to the land; their history outwardly was like that of Israel, but they had come up in a natural way. They had never been under the blood of the passover lamb; they had not been redeemed; they had not gone through the Red Sea or Jordan; they had no experience of God's ways and discipline through the wilderness. Is not that very largely the character of things in the Christian profession to-day? God speaks in 2 Timothy of persons who have the form of piety but deny the power of it—they deceive by imitation. They seem to indicate Philistine elements come up out of the world into the Christian sphere without conversion, without the work of God; there is no true knowledge of God with them. Those are the conditions in which the testimony of God is found to-day, surrounded and in danger of being influenced by Philistine elements. In

presence of such conditions, power is a very great necessity. How can we meet those who deny the power? Only by having the power.

The point in this chapter is, "*He* shall begin to save Israel," verse 5. While we recognise that certain leaders are raised up to do a prominent work, yet we should all be animated by the desire to save Israel. One marked feature in connection with Samson was the individual character of his labours; we never find him leading armies into actual warfare, but what he does, he does single-handed. This character of things is largely contemplated in 2 Timothy; it is an individual path of faithfulness. The more the Christian profession is leavened by the Philistine element, the more necessary it is that we should know what it is to act in the power of God. Timothy was to be a partaker in the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; he was to be a Samson in relation to the testimony, though a weak and timid man. The whole principle on which power comes in is the principle of separation to God. The great feature of 2 Timothy is the insistence on the principle of separation—one is to be a Nazarite to God.

We find in this chapter God's sovereign movements; we have not the exercises or failures of Samson. God has moved sovereignly; the Nazariteship of Samson was not voluntary, not the ordinary vow of a Nazarite, but a definite call from God to Nazariteship. We read in verse 5, "The boy shall be a Nazarite of God from the womb," and again in verse 7, "The boy shall be a Nazarite of God from the womb to the day of his death." Now salvation for Israel comes in on that line; it is God's side—we are committed to it. If I see the sovereignty of God in connection with myself, my exercise is that I may come up to the call of God. It is an exercise for every one of us whether we have come up to what God has marked us out for and called us to.

Paul says, "God, who set me apart even from my

mother's womb, and called me by his grace," Gal. 1: 15. It was pure sovereignty that God separated him. He says in Romans 1, "separated to the gospel of God"; that is, separated from every human thought, separated to the gospel, a gospel Nazarite. Then with Timothy there were certain prophecies as to what he was to be as a servant of God, and he is to take up the exercise. All corresponds with the prophecies which preceded. The divine mind was there as to him. You say, That is Timothy; but God has a definite mind in regard to every one of us. We are all called to be separate to God. There is no option given to Samson's parents and no option left to Samson; he has to move on a certain line from his mother's womb to the day of his death; and if he left that line he was ruined. I believe that is as true of you and me as of Samson; if we do not come up to the divine calling we shall be spiritually wrecked. God's sovereign will is that we should be in complete separation from all human thoughts, from everything that has its source in Egypt; we are to be apart from influences that are natural and unclean. We are to be in separation to God, and prepared to be in a place of outward reproach. No razor was to come on his head—that was the secret of power. If I realise I am moving on the line of God's sovereign will it will give me great power. I am not taking the initiative and hoping God will support me—many a man is like that. If God has called us to the path of absolute separation, He will maintain us in the path He has called us to. The Lord came into this world with the vows of God upon Him, and He is the true Nazarite, absolutely separate from all natural excitement and from everything that would exhilarate the natural man. He was absolutely separate and apart from everything unclean, and He always carried in full sympathy in His own spirit the reproaches of God. "The reproaches of them that reproach thee have fallen upon me," Rom. 15: 3. He was so absolutely separate to God that everything man could say against God came upon Him. That is the One who could save Israel; God can

save Israel by that spirit.

Divine power would come out in ability to correspond with the position in which we are sovereignly placed. If we are prepared to welcome all His sovereign will, we shall welcome our assigned position in sovereignty. A brother has an assigned position; he is to be marked by readiness to pray everywhere—both at home and in the assembly; that is the sovereign will of God. Each brother and each sister is set in God's assembly, and they are set there to function in a certain manner according to the sovereign will of God, and, if we are not, we are failures. If divine power comes in, it would help me to function according to God's sovereign will. "God has set certain in the assembly"—that is a matter of gift. There are certain gifts, and they are graded, they are not all on one level. We must learn our grade in the assembly; it is no use to pretend to be an apostle if I am only a help. If I am content to be a help, power will come in in accepting the sovereignty of God. If we get out of the position in which God in His sovereignty has set us, we cannot expect power. We must not think that Nazariteship is for certain brothers and sisters only; we are under obligation to take the place of Nazariteship, and power lies in honestly accepting and answering to the obligation.

We must not have persons before us instead of the Lord. In this chapter Jehovah seems to say, You must keep Me in mind and not think too much of Samson. The One whose name is Wonderful is acting; now He raises up a spiritual leadership. If I look at a spiritual leader critically I may see defects, but, if I recognise the sovereignty that has put him in that place, I shall not look for defects but for evidence of the power of God. Our happiness in going on together largely depends on each one of us knowing our own place and filling it, and recognising the place which God has assigned to every other brother or sister. Spiritual power will be in proportion to our separation.

The angel's name is Wonderful. It is a great thing to

have before us the One who is Wonderful and who is acting according to His own wonderful Name. When He called me in His grace, and when He set me in a certain position in the assembly, He was acting according to His wonderful Name. Through the assembly is made known the all-various wisdom of God—it is the setting forth of the wonder of God's Name. What a pity to let Philistines come in to dispossess us from these precious thoughts! We need power to act against the Philistine element, and the power is according to the coming down and ascending of Christ Himself. He comes down in this chapter and ascends in the power of the burnt-offering.

The angel would direct the thoughts and heart of Manoah to Jehovah. He said, I will not eat anything you have brought. It is interesting that it is a kid and not a bullock. It is a time when there would not be a greater apprehension than a kid; still it is Christ—it is the burnt-offering and the oblation. There is the carrying out of the sovereign will of God that Christ should go into death for His people. God gives power according to the value of Christ. This is wonderful instruction in the character of divine power. Divine power would bring the Nazarite to the true place of the burnt-offering. Samson's weakness came in on the line of self-gratification, whereas the spiritual instruction set out in chapter 13 is that power moves on the line of self-sacrifice. The angel goes up; divine power is connected with an ascending Christ. People say, There is no power. Is Christ not at the right hand of God? Has He not ascended? All that power is available for every separate man and woman in this world. If there is a vessel unto honour, a vessel marked by Nazariteship, all the power of the ascended Christ is there to support and succour. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"—that is the risen and glorified Man, and the power that is in the Spirit down here is commensurate with the glorious place of the ascended Christ. We are to be spreading forth that kind of atmosphere here. That is

the sort of atmosphere in which Samson was born; he was begotten of the principles of this chapter, and that is the secret of power in the last days. If Samson had but carried with him the secret! But what marked him was the giving up of secrets. What a dreadful thing for a man called to be a Nazarite—whiter than snow—to give up his secret to a wretched Philistine woman! What could be more humiliating! What could be more degrading! But it is just a picture of what might happen to any Christian. If we give up divine secrets, we shall lose our power.

CHAPTER 14

In the history of Samson there is a very marked contrast between his exploits and his personal character. The Spirit of God would suggest to us that we must distinguish between what was done by Samson by divine power and the weakness that was in Samson himself. His personal weakness was a great contrast to his spiritual power. So it would seem as if his history is in two parts, which in a sense have to be looked at separately. We see in Samson something greater than the weakness that marked him as a man. Perhaps it would be well if we looked first at the incidents in his history which are characterised by spiritual actings; and then consider the other side, those incidents in which we see Samson beguiled again and again into utterly false positions.

It is noticeable that there are three occasions where it is said that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him. There is a preliminary statement in the end of the previous chapter: "the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him," chap. 13: 25. That is before he came out in public service; it was in his own home. He is moved by the Spirit before he undertakes any exploits. We see the principle of that even in the Lord; there were spiritual movements in Him before He came out in public service. The private precedes the

public. We are apt to put what is public forward, but we see Samson in private moved by the Spirit of God; there are exercises that no one knows anything about. "The child grew"—that would suggest that he is growing up under the blessing of Jehovah and the Spirit moving him. I think the home circle is where spiritual movements will first be found. The prominent feature in Samson is strength; he is marked by power. What comes out in him is of the greatest importance to us in the last days.

In 2 Timothy stress is laid on power, and we learn there the character of the Philistines, those who are opposed to the testimony of the Lord, not so much outside as inside. Divine power is needed to overcome them, so there is repeated reference to power. "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power," and then, "suffer evil along with the glad tidings according to the power of God"—and in the last chapter, "the Lord stood with me and gave me power." We see the Philistine elements in 2 Timothy—persons who have come in amongst the people of God without any spiritual history. There is nothing vital about them; they have never learned how to solve the riddle. We have to learn to solve the riddle, and no Philistine can solve it. He may borrow it from others, but that is a Philistine dealing in borrowed or stolen goods.

Divine power works, first in the rending of the lion, and then in the swarm of bees who lived in the carcase of a lion—that is, life in death. That is the riddle we have to face. We have to learn that the lion has been rent by divine power. In this instance Samson is a figure of the Lord. The Lord "has annulled death and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings," 2 Tim. 1:10. That answers to the rending of the lion. Paul looks at Nero as representing all the power of the devil against the testimony. He would have swallowed up the testimony if possible, but there was divine power there so that the lion could not devour more—Paul was delivered out of the lion's mouth. The starting point of everything lies there,

that Satan's power has been overthrown in death, and life comes out of that. No Philistine could understand that. It puts the saints in an extraordinary position to have derived everything through death; that makes nothing of me or of anything I could attach to myself. It is very reducing to learn that all strength and sweetness has come through death. We cannot bring the Philistine into death; if we do there is an end of him. There is a mutual working of the energy of life in the carcase of the lion; the bees are there and are making honey. If you and I have nothing but what we have derived through the death of Christ, we shall work harmoniously together in making honey. It requires the co-operative activities of love, and no Philistine can take part in it. The apostle speaks in 2 Timothy of certain turning away from him, and in turning away from Paul they had left the testimony. Phygellus and Hermogenes were not marked by life, but Onesiphorus was. The activities of life are needed in 2 Timothy days, and that is where divine power comes in; in that way we should have honey for the Lord when He comes into the midst. He delights to partake of the fruit of the mutual activities of love amongst His people. On the ground of the death of Christ such conditions can be brought about; we can have food and sweetness as the result of the mutual activities of love, and the first acting of divine power is to bring that about. The angel might well say his name was Wonderful.

Chapter 13 shows that all power in the last days will depend on Nazariteship—on separation to God. In Samson we see the power of God illustrated and we also see the enticing and withering influence of the world which is brought to bear on saints to rob them of their Nazariteship. We do not lose things all at once, but in the end Samson lost his Nazariteship. It is a shame for a man to wear long hair—if we leave the place of shame we have lost our Nazariteship. We begin with the principle that all strength and sweetness and all the activities of life flow

out of death. Paul says, "If we have died with him, we shall also live with him"—he makes it the basis of everything. This works all through in a practical sense; we only touch life as death works on our wills and natural likings.

Samson turned aside to see the carcase of the lion. He was looking out for the fruit of triumph; he expected full fruit from his exploit. The Lord is looking on to see what is the fruit in us of His going into death; He did not intend it to be fruitless. The Lord came back in resurrection to eat the honeycomb; He came to see the fruit of His death, and He found the disciples together in love. Think of the risen Lord eating a piece of a honeycomb! Where there are the mutual activities of life, there support and strength are yielded, and there is sweetness. The honeycomb is the result of the mutual activity of love amongst the saints.

Samson is characterised by betraying secrets. There is no secret so precious as to cherish in one's heart that one has nothing but what comes out of Christ's death. Divine secrets are not published to everyone; they are only known by those divinely taught. *Mystery* is a characteristic word of Christianity. Think of people moving about this world with the secret that they derive nothing save through the death of Christ! A Philistine could never understand that. The test is that we are in the midst of people who admit the facts and assent to the doctrine of Christianity; some even are more intelligent than ourselves. Now have we a riddle that they cannot solve? A test is suggested in this chapter as to what is genuine. There is a divine proposal that if you can solve the riddle you will have a change of raiment. If we really solve the riddle spiritually we shall not only have a private source of sweetness and strength, and enjoy the mutualities of life with the brethren, but we shall appear in a new style publicly. It suggests that we come out publicly in the features of 2 Timothy. Solving the riddle is the result of inward exercise, of learning in our souls that there is not a single thing that we attach the smallest value to that

has not come to us through the death of Christ. That results in the mutual working of the company in love which produces food and sweetness. If we have solved the riddle we get a change of raiment; our external behaviour, character and associations are new. The spiritual instruction of this chapter is of vital importance if we want to take up things with divine strength in this day.

There was that in Samson's private history that was not in keeping with the outward, for the Spirit of Jehovah had moved him in secret. We must have a new kind of life both inwardly and outwardly brought in through the death of the Lord. Any kind of religious life I could have as a child of Adam goes for nothing.

We see the second example of Samson's power in verse 19, where he smites thirty men and takes their spoil.

The third example of power is in the next chapter, when his brethren would deliver him up and the ropes become as flax and he takes the jaw-bone of an ass and slays a thousand men. We see how little his brethren were in the secret that the power of God was with him. They were prepared to accept the rule of the Philistines, but if the power of Jehovah was with Samson it could not be of faith to accept the Philistine rule. This only served to bring out the greatness of the power there was in Samson. Divine power comes out in the use of instruments that men would not select for that purpose. Men would never select the jaw-bone of an ass as a weapon to meet a thousand men. The power of God has manifested itself in selecting what is of no account. In 1 Corinthians we see that God chooses weak, base, foolish, despised things, and things that are not. We have to accept that as the way that divine power works. Paul had to be crippled as to his natural powers to make him serviceable.

The Spirit of God has sorted out the history of Samson for us by calling attention to the Spirit of Jehovah coming upon him. The Spirit has thus marked out certain features as being spiritual in character, and we have to separate them from the history of failures in Samson himself.

CHAPTERS 15 & 16

It is well for us to keep in mind that, Samson being the last of the judges, his history brings out the most important principles for us in the last days. It would seem that we learn in Samson the secret of strength and the secret of weakness.

It is mentioned twice that Samson judged Israel twenty years, indicating that there was that in Samson which was for the deliverance of the people of God. Just because there was that, he seemed to be especially assailed by things that would divert him and deprive him of his power. He sets forth exercises that come very closely home to our souls in these last days.

We have already noted this three times in which we are told that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Samson. Whenever that was the case he was marked by power to overcome, whether it was the lion or the Philistine. Then we see that power in itself is not sufficient to maintain us for God. There must be that which is inward. There may be great power for service in certain quarters and it is of the Spirit of God wherever souls are being converted and the people of God helped; but we see in Samson, verse 18, that, after doing very great exploits in the power of the Spirit of God, he after all was a thirsty man. A man may have the power of the Spirit of God on him for mighty acts of service, and yet not have inward satisfaction, the power of life in his own soul by the Spirit. These great lessons are for the last days. Power is a matter of sovereignty. God by His Spirit can work sovereignly; He can use any instrument He sees fit; but the real life and joy and satisfaction of our hearts inwardly is another matter. Many a servant may be publicly marked by extraordinary power in service, and yet not know the blessedness of inward satisfaction—he may be a thirsty man. At the end of chapter 15 Samson has to learn the

Spirit in a new way. Perhaps the Lord would call our attention to the Spirit under this beautiful designation, En-hakkore, "the caller's spring." Paul speaks of "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"; he feels the need of this in order that he might meet his sufferings, persecutions, and pressure with an inward source of supply. The epistle to the Philippians brings out largely the inwardness of things.

There are two incidents in the life of Samson where he is seen as calling on Jehovah. One is in chapter 15: 18, where he is very thirsty, and he called on Jehovah, "And God clave the hollow rock which was in Lehi, and water came out of it and he drank, and his spirit came again and he revived. Therefore its name was called En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day." The other time is in chapter 16: 28 : "And Samson called to Jehovah and said, Lord Jehovah, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may take one vengeance upon the Philistines for my two eyes." I would suggest that Samson as calling on Jehovah is a greater man morally and spiritually than he was in all the other incidents of his history. It is a peculiar resource of the last days that we call on the name of the Lord.

The power spoken of in 2 Timothy is an inward power rather than what is outward. I have known several instances of men who have served and been used of God, but when they had been withdrawn from what is external it came to light that they had very little of what was internal. Samson was one with a most extraordinary power—there is not a man in Scripture who externally had such strength—but, notwithstanding that, he was conscious inwardly that his heart was unsatisfied and he was a thirsty man. He has to call, and then, in type, he gets the Spirit in a new way in connection with what is inward—not power to do great exploits outwardly, but to satisfy his inward cravings. My impression is that in Samson calling on the Lord we see something morally greater than

his killing thousands of Philistines. However much God is pleased to use me publicly, sooner or later the question is raised, Have I the thirst of my soul satisfied? Have I the Spirit inwardly, not only for outward power; that is "the caller's spring," a beautiful designation of the Spirit.

We are so apt to go on with what is outward, but I believe a time comes with every one of us when we are brought face to face with this question: I have had meetings, and they have been very precious; I have had the companionship of the brethren, and it was very sweet; I have had ministry and it has been happy; I have had the power for service, and it has been wonderful, but I am not satisfied. None of these things or all put together will give inward satisfaction. Inward satisfaction would not detract from the power God gives for service; it would add to it. I think it was a poet who said, "All great deeds flow from the centre of a quiet heart." It is from a quiet, restful, and satisfied heart that the most efficient service flows; we want the caller's spring.

In Numbers 21 the proposal comes from the divine side. God says, "Gather the people together and I will give them water." But in John 4 we are to ask: "If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water." God is the Giver and He is seeking to awaken thirst by presenting what He has to give. It is of vital importance in these last days that we should know what it is to be in life inwardly; this book is exercise for the last days. The calling is the expression of inward exercise. We do not see that in Samson's case when the Spirit of Jehovah comes upon him; that is the sovereign act of God. But what he gets in answer to calling comes in connection with his inward exercise. It is what is inward that will help us in the last days—something that God gives which meets the exercises and cravings that have been produced in our souls Godward. It is a personal and an individual matter.

In connection with this incident we find a remarkable little phrase which often occurs in the Old Testament, "to this day." These words have a moral force and indicate that the matter which is spoken of has a permanent place in the ways of God with His people. It is available for us now. The spring subsists morally unto this day; the Spirit as "the caller's spring" is there to this day. I would encourage all our hearts to entertain thoughts of the Spirit as "the caller's spring." We know a little what it is to be supported in our testimony and in our conflicts; but what is inside me is more important as far as I am concerned personally than anything I do in conflict outwardly. We see in Stephen the two things. There was an extraordinary power in his testimony; he goes through the whole history of the people and presses their guilt on them at every turn, but, great as Stephen's testimony is, he himself inwardly is as great, when he kneels down while they batter him with stones. That angelic face shines with the light of heaven while their murderous stones batter on it, and he cries, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." When you read that wonderful address, one of the most marvellous chapters in Scripture, you see the man in his extraordinary power. He is a king among men. When you see him kneel in prayer, you see the wonderful inwardness of him; Stephen inwardly is as great as Stephen outwardly.

Samson's second calling on the Lord was when he lost his sight and liberty. He had been betrayed into forfeiting his Nazariteship, and he was a poor blind prisoner making sport for the Philistines. He reached the lowest point that a servant of God could reach, and from that point he calls on Jehovah and becomes greater than he had ever been before. In spite of his falling so low, there is inherent power in Samson that is greater than all the power of the world and greater than all the power under which he fell.

If we look at the weaknesses that come out in Samson, we find that he was tested in three ways. The Philistine

woman in chapter 14 represents what is natural; the harlot of chapter 16 represents what is carnal; and Delilah represents what is Satanic, for from the outset she is identified with the adversary and does her utmost to destroy Samson. God by His ways delivers His servant from each of these three snares. Samson's weakness left him open to these influences, but that which was of God in him extricated him in each case from the snare. Satan will use either the natural or the carnal or the Satanic in order to undermine the truth of Nazariteship. He will try to rob us of our Nazariteship until he has done for us. But we see in Samson that, in spite of all the weakness that came out in him, there is something else there and God delivers him.

God delivers him from the Philistine woman in chapter 14 by keen disappointment. Samson did not get what he expected; he was keenly disappointed when he found he had a woman who betrayed his secret, and he was disappointed when he found that she was given to his companion. Many of us have known what it is to be influenced on the line of what is natural, and we have found on that line nothing but disappointment; we did not get a single thing that we expected. That is how God delivered us from the natural.

The harlot represents carnal or fleshly influences and, through yielding to these influences, Samson finds himself in a terrible place of restraint. He finds himself shut up in Gaza, the gates barred, and the people waiting to kill him in the morning. But we find that there is a power in Samson that enables him to make his escape. Speaking typically, there was something in Samson that was great enough to break loose from the snare in which he had been taken; he rises up at midnight and carries off the gates and bars of Gaza. That was not the Spirit of the Lord upon him; it was what Samson was himself, the inherent power in him which enabled him to do it. We have all seen cases like this, the saints of God taken captive by what is

fleshly, but in many cases we have had the joy of seeing that there was inherent power in them as born of God that has enabled them to make their escape from the position into which those carnal influences had thrown them. It is a fine thing to see saints who have been overcome by the flesh and in terrible bondage rising up and freeing themselves, so that they have been able to carry off the gates and bars and they are recovered to the companionship of the people of God—that is what Hebron means. If we see a person who has failed restored to the companionship of the people of God, we are apt to dwell on the failure and to hold it as a black mark against that person for the rest of his life, I am sure that is not of God. I believe that, if a saint has fallen under the power of the flesh, and has found that he has a power as born of God to get free from it, we ought to be more occupied with the thought of the energy with which he freed himself than with the weakness which brought him into captivity. The cleansed leper was a greater man morally than the man in Israel who had never been a leper. That is a thing only understood in the school of grace.

Delilah represents what is Satanic, what is directly opposed to the testimony of God. From the first she does her utmost to get Samson's secret, and eventually she succeeds. It is a most solemn warning. To think that a man who is the great picture of strength in Scripture should become such a melancholy exhibition of weakness! Power for the testimony of God lies in Nazariteship, and Delilah plies her arts on Samson until in the end she gets his secret, and then she betrays him. Then she takes good care not merely to cut his hair; she shaves it until not a vestige is left of his Nazaritehip. He has yielded and given himself up to this wicked woman so that he loses every vestige of his Nazariteship, and the Philistines take him and bind him and put him in prison and actually make him an object of sport; he makes amusement for them. What a depth to fall to! Can any saint fall lower than

that? They have put his eyes out, and he is reduced to the lowest point. But it is most encouraging to find that even then the energy of life is in his soul and his hair begins to grow. The man who has drunk at the caller's spring has life in his soul so that, whatever happens to him, his hair begins to grow. Although the Philistines had put out his eyes, it was only a deliverance, for his eyes had been his ruin—"he *saw* a woman of the Philistines," "he *saw* a harlot." When they put out his eyes they only delivered him from that which had led him astray. That is God's government. However low we fall, God always acts on the line of deliverance, and when we fall under the power of Satan we are delivered as we accept the government of God. When Samson, the blind prisoner, grinding in the prison house, and making sport for the Philistines, called on the Lord, he was a greater man than he had ever been before. He could do more than he ever did before, but he did it by death. He had to learn that his own death was the secret of power. We have all to face these lessons.

The two callings on Jehovah are connected with the secret of power. The first calling in chapter 15 is connected with the power of life; the caller's spring is where the Spirit brings the power of life into a man's soul. The second power brings out the power of death, and we have to learn that the two things go together. Paul says to the Corinthians, "We who live are always delivered unto death"—"I protest by your rejoicing in Christ Jesus that I die daily"—and again, "Death works in us, but life in you." Paul had not only learnt the secret of life but the secret of death. When Samson had learnt the secret of death, he was ready to be taken away. He had reached the climax; he slew more in his death than ever in his life. When I come to accept my death, the great secret of the power of God works in me, and I become an efficient instrument for the use of God.

CHAPTERS 17 & 18

In the previous part of the book we found the people departing from Jehovah, forgetting Jehovah; but we come now to what is perhaps even more serious than that; what is idolatrous is definitely connected with the Name of Jehovah. It has application to idolatry in what might be called a Christian form.

Micah's mother teaches her son what is idolatrous, but it is connected with the Name of Jehovah. She says she has dedicated the silver to Jehovah.

The Spirit of God has called attention to the blessedness of the presence of the Lord in the midst of His saints, and the holy conditions that must be connected with the place where the Lord is known in the midst of His people, and there is a great imitation which takes an idolatrous form, but God's Name is connected with it. All the precious truths that are known at the present period are adopted, but cast into an idolatrous form. There is an imitation priesthood, the ephod, a son consecrated; it is the form, but it is imitation. It raises the question whether we are going on with spiritual reality, or with mere imitation.

This mother is an earth-dweller; a cursing mother, not a blessing mother like Jerusalem above. As we are true to heavenly light we are preserved from all forms which come in by something being substituted for heavenly light. I must have an image, a picture, or ritual, to make divine Persons more real to me. It is a turning aside from the spiritual.

It is easy for us to get on the line of graven and molten images. A molten image would be something that could be easily multiplied. It is cast in a certain form; it is like a fixed form of service. If we get into a fixed form, in our prayers and praises, we may be in danger of molten images, instead of what is living and suitable to the light

of revelation. What is not in spirit and in truth tends to either a molten image or a graven image. A molten image is a thing that can be easily multiplied; you could print it in a book so that anybody could follow it. The graven image is a little more the product of the activity of the human mind—conceptions of God worked out in man's mind, not according to the light of revelation, but worked out according to the mind of man. I think the graven image would suggest that. We must beware of human touch in connection with the holy things of God.

It is solemn to think of a Levite, Moses' grandson, being mentioned in this way, chapter 17: 8 and chapter 18: 30; it is a terrible drop. He leaves Bethlehem-Judah to seek a place. His grandfather had said, "Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book." The true tribe of Levi answered to the challenge, "*Who* is for Jehovah." It is a terrible thing to drop down from that to sojourn and seek a place. This Levite was a kind of Diotrephes; he is not seeking a place for Jehovah, but seeking a place for himself. If we do that, the devil will be sure to have us identified with what is positively idolatrous.

In chapter 18 the Danites are looking for territory. They represent those who have been professedly and nominally on heavenly ground finding no satisfaction there and wanting another portion. It is a picture of the people of God seeking a place on earth, because heavenly territory makes too much demand on them. They speak of the land at Laish as being spacious in every direction and of there being no want of anything that is on the earth. There is a sphere of things that lies open to be seized on where people say, "We are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." Micah's religion just suits those conditions. The heavenly ground was not spacious enough for these Danites, and they reached a place where there was no one who possessed authority to put them to shame, where conscience was never exercised. We see in Samson the power of recovery, though he exposes great

weakness. But there was no recovery in these Danites; there was a terrible kind of secession going on till the days of the captivity.

There is a beautiful touch in the last verses of chapter 18. The house of God is in Shiloh all the time. If idolatry goes on, yet all the time the house of God is in Shiloh. Shiloh was lost to the Danites altogether, but it was there for such as Boaz, Elkanah and Hannah; the house of God was there. The two systems are in contrast here. There is a system that professedly gives Jehovah a place, but is essentially idolatrous and is connected with a wholly false position for the people of God, where they have no enjoyment of the God-given inheritance, but are under the influence of things on earth. On the other hand there is another system here; the house of God is in Shiloh, the tabernacle is there, and the ark is there.

The preservative from idolatry is in John's writings; they would preserve us from everything idolatrous, and that which has the character of imitation, what is not life. John would preserve us and keep us at Shiloh, the place where the rights of Christ are recognised.

CHAPTERS 19, 20 & 21

From the beginning of chapter 17 to the end of the book there are incidents which expose the moral state of the people of God in a very sad way. Perhaps the greater evil comes first, that is, the connecting of idolatry with the Name of Jehovah; that is the greatest evil possible, but it did not awaken anything like the indignation that was aroused in Israel by the moral corruption that came to light in Gibeah. There are things against which the natural conscience revolts, and everybody would rise up against them, but those are not the worst things. An offence directly against God in holy things is the worst possible evil. There was no gathering of all Israel from

Dan to Beersheba in connection with idolatry in the house of Micah, furthered by a grandson of Moses. It might have been expected that such a thing would rouse all Israel as one man, but it did not.

This history shows that we are more likely to be roused by something that offends moral propriety than by something that touches directly the service and the glory of the Lord. The natural conscience can take account of the former, but it needs real love for God to feel deeply what sets God aside, and what is due to Himself among the people. What was done was very dreadful; it was the result, no doubt, of the association of the people with the Canaanites, and they had learned their abominable ways. It was, as Scripture says, "lewdness and villainy in Israel"; all that the people said about it was true. So they all assembled unto Jehovah in Mizpah and the gathering was spoken of as the congregation of the people of God. Dreadful as their state was, there was enough conscience left in them to be shocked at this gross wickedness. They used right terms about it. The Levite said, "They have committed lewdness and villany *in Israel*," verse 6; and in the end of verse 10 the people said, "according to all the villany that they have wrought *in Israel*," and in verse 13 they spoke of putting away evil "from Israel." But we often say right things without feeling them at all. They did not feel it as the sin of Israel, but as the sin of Gibeah. If they had felt it as the sin of Israel, they would all have been on their faces before God, confessing it as their own sin. They took it up in a way God could not support; they did not *feel* it, though they *said* what was right. There was a natural indignation about what was manifestly wicked, which was not the fruit of communion with God at all. There was no sign of their being humbled before God. They did not seek direction; they decided what they would do; they say, It cannot be tolerated; we must go and execute judgment on them at once. It was right, but they were not moving with God in it. So, while this evil

was dealt with in faithfulness, yet it was only through much chastisement that the people were brought into such a state that God could be with them in what they were doing. Even then they had to go through the deepest sorrow about it, and realise that the thing had been handled in such a way that they nearly lost a tribe out of Israel. They did not take it up as the sin of Israel; they might have learned from the case of Achan when Jehovah said, "*Israel* hath sinned," and He held all Israel responsible. It should have been taken up as an assembly exercise. If anything happens among the people of God that is unbecoming and offensive, (there are some things offensive to the natural conscience), the first exercise should be that such a thing has transpired in *Israel*, so that it is for Israel to be humbled about it, to take up its shame and sorrow in deep humiliation with God. One can quite conceive that, if they had done so, it might have had a great effect on Benjamin; they would have said, Why, they are all breaking their hearts in sorrow about what we have done, and confessing our sin as if it had been their own! I think it would have touched them.

This is a very important consideration for us about all disciplinary action, that is, as to our condition of soul in dealing with it, whether we are really with God in dealing with it. When there is anything glaringly wrong it is easy to say it is wrong and must be judged, but am I really with God in doing it? This is a searching exercise for us, because it is easy to see ten thousand things that are wrong, and many that are grossly offensive, but how do we feel them? Paul says to the Corinthians, "Ye have not rather mourned," 1 Cor. 5: 2. Even though they did not know how to deal with the wicked person, if they had mourned, the Lord would have dealt with him. Israel had to go through sorrow and very much exercise; they had to weep and fast, and bring burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and to recognise that after all Benjamin was their brother. Then they had to be severely chastened;

22,000 of them were killed in one day, and 18,000 on the next day. They were doing what was right, but God did not support their action. They were so indignant that they put themselves under a solemn oath to deal with it in the most drastic fashion, but they were not with God.

Then we see a very much worse condition in Benjamin. It was not the whole tribe that was guilty, but certain sons of Belial in a certain city; yet the whole tribe of Benjamin refused to judge the matter, and that was worse than the sin; to refuse to judge the evil is worse than the sin itself. Someone asked Mr. Darby how much evil would justify one in leaving a company of Christians, and he answered, No amount of evil would justify anyone in separating from any company of Christians, but the refusal to *judge* the least bit of evil would justify separation. It is important to understand that. Evil may come in anywhere, but, if it comes in, it must be judged. The holiness of God and the righteousness of His throne demand judgment, and, if we refuse to judge, everything is forfeited. Benjamin refused to judge the evil; they would not deliver up these sons of Belial, so Benjamin came under the avenging stroke that was really divine justice.

There is twice an appeal to the whole company to deliberate and give counsel. It is sometimes easier to do that than to ask counsel of God. We do not find that they enquired before they decided their course. This represents a state of things, no doubt, very likely to be found in the last days of the church. There may be a certain indignation about that which is wrong, and faithful dealing with it, and yet it may not be handled in a spiritual way, and the result may be very solemn. It could never be the divine intent to blot out a tribe in Israel; that could never be God's thought.

We need more exercise about the state of things generally in Israel to-day so that we do not say *they*; we are apt to say, *he* or *she*, or *they*, but we must learn to say *we*. I

feel it in myself that I can see many evils in the Christian profession, but I must confess that I do not find myself ready to bear the shame and sorrow as my own; and yet if I were with God I should. There is a path in the midst of all the corruption and evil which is the path of the just, but it does not put you outside Israel.

These seven hundred chosen men of Gibeah might have been saved to the people of God. There is often a refusal to judge things on the part of even chosen men. They are very accurate men too; they could sling stones at a hair and not miss. How sad that men like that should refuse to judge what is evil! It is sad to see better men than ourselves who are not prepared to judge what is manifestly evil. We ought to feel it. I have seen it—able men, accurate men, chosen men—the more excellent they are, the more we should feel it if they are not prepared to judge evil. We see earnest, devoted and godly men, not prepared to judge what is evil, and we ought to feel it much.

It was divine order that Judah should take the lead, but God did not support him. Israel had to be chastened by the loss of 22,000 men, and the next day by the loss of 18,000. It is not for us to question the disciplinary ways of God with His people. Judah's whole moral state was wrong, and so was the state of all Israel; their consciences were outraged at what had been done, but they were not feeling it as God would have them feel it. He had to chasten them till they did feel it, in measure, as God would have them feel it, and then God says, "I will give them into thy hand", chapter 20: 28, and we find that *Jehovah* smote Benjamin before Israel, verse 35. He smote them in the end.

Self-righteousness can come in in a very subtle way, even in connection with the judgment of evil. If I am on the line of You are wrong, and I right, that is pure self-righteousness, and that is just the point God had to bring the people to. They had to be brought to the house of God,

to Bethel, to weep, and fast, and offer burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. They had to come to the foundation on which they stood with God, and the foundation on which they could go on with one another, and that is the death of Christ. It is not that Benjamin is wrong and I am right; that is not the point.

When they went to Phinehas they brought the burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. A remarkable cluster of ideas is brought forward; the ark of the covenant and Phinehas are there. Now Phinehas was a man who in his day executed summary judgment on what was evil. No man in Scripture was more noted than Phinehas for judgment of evil; he judged it unsparingly, but God says of him, "He was jealous with *my* jealousy," Num. 22: 11. We have to be brought to this, that we are not jealous with natural indignation, but with God's jealousy. We have to ask when we judge any kind of evil, Is this my jealousy or God's? If we have God's jealousy we shall have a blessed sense of the burnt-offerings, the peace-offerings, and the ark of the covenant. These are fine things to take account of when any discipline is on hand. Phinehas had the covenant of the everlasting priesthood; he was entirely apart from any human motives; he took the javelin in his hand in jealousy for God; there was no natural indignation with him at all, but holy, priestly and spiritual indignation. We have to come to that. A man of the world can judge what is wrong, for men have their code of good and evil, but God says to His people, I want you to judge it with Me—I want you to be in communion with Me about it, and judge it far more deeply than you would judge it with your natural conscience. Paul was the Phinehas of the New Testament.

On what ground are we? If we are going on with God it is on the ground of the value of the burnt-offering; we are with God entirely on the ground of the death of Christ. We are with the brethren on the ground of the peace-offering; that is the death of Christ in another aspect.

That preserves us from any feelings of self-righteousness when judging evil. If not, we shall have the spirit of self-righteousness; I should say, That brother is wrong, and I am right. God will not have that spirit. We have to learn that it is on the footing of Christ that we are with God, and with one another.

The ark brings us back to the true character of the dispensation that we are never to forget. We must not forget that the covenant is the basis of all; Christ is the ark of the covenant; every thought of God for blessing is secured in Christ.

I have often thought that it is remarkable that there is not a sin-offering here. I should have brought it in if it had been left to me, but, no, it is the burnt-offering and the peace-offering; that is, it refers to the ground on which the people were with God; they are there, not blessed because of their faithfulness or righteousness, but because of Christ. Now, we have to retain that in all judgment of evil; that we do not think ourselves better than the people whom we have to judge. We are not on that ground with God at all. We are on the ground of Christ, and our fellowship together as saints is based on Christ and His death. We are right to judge what is evil, and separate, but it is not the basis of our communion. Christ is the basis of our communion. God has to bring the people to that ground by His chastisement, and then they move forward and execute a fearful judgment on Benjamin, so that the tribe is nearly blotted out, nearly exterminated, and the next chapter tells us that they repented concerning their brother Benjamin, and they had to weep and mourn before God over the fact that a tribe was lost, and was likely to be permanently lost in Israel. God would teach us that in having to separate from our brethren at a time of conflict. There is sometimes great zeal to maintain what is right, and a great deal of faithfulness, and we stand for God in a crisis, but perhaps the result is that we lose a great many brethren. Now do we feel it? Do we feel

to Bethel, to weep, and fast, and offer burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. They had to come to the foundation on which they stood with God, and the foundation on which they could go on with one another, and that is the death of Christ. It is not that Benjamin is wrong and I am right; that is not the point.

When they went to Phinehas they brought the burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. A remarkable cluster of ideas is brought forward; the ark of the covenant and Phinehas are there. Now Phinehas was a man who in his day executed summary judgment on what was evil. No man in Scripture was more noted than Phinehas for judgment of evil; he judged it unsparingly, but God says of him, "He was jealous with *my* jealousy," Num. 22: 11. We have to be brought to this, that we are not jealous with natural indignation, but with God's jealousy. We have to ask when we judge any kind of evil, Is this my jealousy or God's? If we have God's jealousy we shall have a blessed sense of the burnt-offerings, the peace-offerings, and the ark of the covenant. These are fine things to take account of when any discipline is on hand. Phinehas had the covenant of the everlasting priesthood; he was entirely apart from any human motives; he took the javelin in his hand in jealousy for God; there was no natural indignation with him at all, but holy, priestly and spiritual indignation. We have to come to that. A man of the world can judge what is wrong, for men have their code of good and evil, but God says to His people, I want you to judge it with Me—I want you to be in communion with Me about it, and judge it far more deeply than you would judge it with your natural conscience. Paul was the Phinehas of the New Testament.

On what ground are we? If we are going on with God it is on the ground of the value of the burnt-offering; we are with God entirely on the ground of the death of Christ. We are with the brethren on the ground of the peace-offering; that is the death of Christ in another aspect.

That preserves us from any feelings of self-righteousness when judging evil. If not, we shall have the spirit of self-righteousness; I should say, That brother is wrong, and I am right. God will not have that spirit. We have to learn that it is on the footing of Christ that we are with God, and with one another.

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we have lost Benjamin? I do not think God allows us to go on without feeling that a tribe is lost. The result of the discipline had been to exterminate a tribe. If it had been handled in a more spiritual way there would have been a divine way of getting at it without losing a tribe.

I was speaking to one recently about a certain brother who had been withdrawn from, and I asked if there was any movement of recovery with him. He said, No; we have had to go through a great deal of exercise whether, if we had handled him in a more gracious way, he might have been saved. I was glad to hear that; it was a right exercise. The man was rightly judged, but afterwards the Lord put His people through this exercise. That is the exercise of the last chapter; they repented concerning their brother Benjamin. It was not that they had modified their judgment of evil, but they felt that they had lost their brother. How searching these exercises are! The people had sworn, they had taken an oath, and they had to abide by their oath. They had sworn that everybody that did not come up should be killed. They killed all the men of Jabesh-Gilead. It was right, but perhaps if they had been more spiritual they need not have sworn.

They had sworn they would not give their daughters to Benjamin. It looked like extreme faithfulness; it put them in a difficulty. The last chapter tells us of the difficulty they had in getting wives for the six hundred men of Benjamin so that a tribe should not be lost. What a dreadful thing it would have been if one stone had had to be torn out of the breastplate! Who could fancy the mutilation of the breastplate by a stone being torn out! When they came to look at things according to God they could not bear to think of Benjamin being lost. It should be more of a real sorrow to have to part company with anyone we can recognise as a true saint. We may have to do it, but the question is, How do we face it? The lesson of this chapter is not as to righteousness; what they did was perfectly right, but what they did had not a divine savour, and they

had to be made to feel that, in their zeal and faithfulness, they had nearly brought a disaster on Israel that could have been avoided, had they carried themselves through in a more spiritual manner. It was right that Benjamin should be smitten, but in what spirit is it to be done?

These closing chapters give us the moral state of Israel generally. It is not like a political history, under judges, but they are incidents brought in to show us the actual moral state of the people, how far they were from God, even in judging evil; they were doing what was right in their own eyes. All this is very exercising for us. This would not be put in God's word if we did not need it.

To take this home would prepare us to go on with Ruth. The book of Ruth shows us what is of God. He has shown us in Judges what failure there was everywhere among His people, but He reserves this beautiful book of Ruth as an appendix to show what was of Himself in the midst of it all.

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

CHAPTER 1

We must all have noticed a striking contrast between the book of Judges and the one we have now before us. In Judges we see repeated departures of the people of God, and Jehovah's gracious intervention in raising up deliverers to relieve the oppression of His afflicted people. But we do not see anywhere in the book of Judges recovery to the normal enjoyment of the inheritance. The judges were not wholly types of Christ, even Gideon led the people into a snare. There are incidents in their history which may be viewed as typical of certain things connected with Christ, but the judges were marked by defects, though God used them as instruments to deliver His people in their generation. Not one of them was great enough to reinstate the people in the enjoyment of the inheritance according to God. But in the book of Ruth there is recovery of the inheritance. One is found great enough to exercise the right of redemption, to redeem the inheritance and to secure a seed to enjoy it. And there is a peculiarly attractive charm about the book which appeals even to those who are not able to perceive its spiritual import.

In the book of Judges not only did no redeemer appear great enough to restore fully according to God that which had been departed from, but, on the other hand, moral conditions suitable to divine recovery were not present in the people. What marks Judges is the statement that every man did what was right in his own eyes. There could be no true recovery or reinstatement in such a condition; and, alas! it is a condition that very largely bars the way to recovery of the inheritance at the present time amongst the people of God.

Movement on the line of recovery is brought about by

such dealings of God as are seen in Ruth 1. Brokenness of spirit—a broken and contrite heart under the dealings of God—is an absolute necessity, and it is the preparation for all recovery. If we belonged to a profession that had not failed, and if we ourselves had not failed, there would be no such history as we see pictured in this chapter. But if it be true that we belong to a profession that has grievously failed and departed from God and lost the enjoyment of the inheritance, and we ourselves have so failed as to have personally contributed to the general state of departure, there is surely a loud call to humble ourselves in self-judgment before God.

There is nothing more common to-day than for people to assert that the churches are moving on, and that, indeed, things have greatly developed in a favourable direction. The false church says, "I sit a queen, and I am not a widow," Rev. 18: 7. We are surrounded by the boastings of Laodicea. "I am rich, and am grown rich, and have need of nothing." But the Lord says, "Thou art the wretched and the miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," Rev. 3: 17. If there is no sense of departure there will be no desire for recovery. But if under the dealings of God our true condition is brought home to us, and we are humble and contrite in heart, there is something that God can acknowledge and restore. We see this in Naomi.

Elimelech means, Whose God is King, and Naomi means, My pleasantness. They represent the original state of Israel as called of God into His favour. God acted in kingly power to bring to pass His own thought of blessing. Balaam said of Israel in his parable, "Jehovah his God is with him, and the shout of a king is in his midst." All through their history we can see that their God is King. Whether in His actings for them in Egypt, or in the wilderness, or His setting them in the land, all is the exercise of His kingly power. Then Naomi—my pleasantness—speaks of the people as a delight to God. That was how they came into the inheritance. God acted in kingly power doing everything

for them, and on their side as responsive to Him in the bond of the covenant they were pleasant in His sight. That was their original status.

But what a change in the chapter before us! We see here God the King acting governmentally according to the sorrowful conditions which existed among His people. There are two sides to the truth of the kingdom. As the "King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible, only God" He acts to bring about the blessing of His people. But, on the other hand, His being King involves His government, and if conditions are present which are not pleasing to Him His governmental dealings in an adverse sense are inevitable. It was so in Israel; it is so in the assembly. Under the government of God there was famine even in Bethlehem—the house of bread—and Elimelech went out from the inheritance to sojourn in the fields of Moab. It is sad when there is famine in the place where we would most expect to find food. But the government of God acts inevitably and universally according to the conditions present in His people. How good it is to see, as in the history before us, that even the goverment of God eventually subserves the purposes of His grace!

Naomi found herself bereft both of her husband and her sons. Famine-stricken, an exile from the inheritance, widowed, empty of all but the sad memory of better and brighter days in the past! What a pathetic picture! "I am in much more bitterness than you; for the hand of Jehovah is gone out against me." "Call me not Naomi—call me Mara (Bitterness): for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and Jehovah has brought me home again empty. Why do ye call me Naomi, seeing Jehovah has brought me low, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

Under the dealings of God exercises were produced in the soul of Naomi—a deep sense of what had been lost, and of the hand of God upon her. Such exercises as these are necessary before restoration can come about. No doubt this book has reference to God's dealings with Israel. Israel at the

present moment is impoverished, scattered far and wide from the inheritance, bereft of all divine support and consolation, and in a future day they will have to pass through even more intense sorrow and tribulation, but God will eventually use these things to bring them into such true contrition that He will be free to reinstate them in full blessing through Christ.

But if this book refers in a typical way to Israel's departure and restoration through Christ, the actings of grace which are brought out in such a sweet and touching way have their place also with saints who are of the assembly. The way of recovery is, in principle, the same for ourselves as for Israel. We cannot read the epistles without seeing how greatly the people of God in this period have departed from the truth, and lost the enjoyment of the inheritance that was freely given to them of God. The Lord's words to the assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3 have a solemn bearing on this. An urgent call to repentance appears in five of them. If we have not some sense of departure we shall not fully appreciate the grace of recovery which shines so brightly in the book of Ruth. Alas! we are so often occupied in seeking our own things, and doing it in such an individual and isolated way that we hardly realise how the people of God have lost the enjoyment of their divinely allotted portion.

Naomi sets forth the deep exercises which will be found in those who listen to the Lord's words to the assemblies, and who realise that they belong to a profession that has grievously failed, and that they are suffering the deprivation of much that was the enjoyed inheritance of saints at the beginning. The sad truth of the position was pressed home on the soul of Naomi; she was made to feel it deeply. Instead of the inheritance being abundantly fruitful in every good, it had ceased to yield its harvests. "There was a famine IN THE LAND." Strange and sad contrast to the fertility which had been pledged to obedient and faithful lovers of Jehovah!

For a Bethlehemite to be sojourning in the fields of Moab was far from the thoughts of God for His people. It was in itself the evidence that His people had departed from Him, and His blessing had been withdrawn from them. The inheritance had not only failed of the blessing of God, but they had left it, to go to a land whose inhabitants were of such a character under the eye of God that they were forbidden to come into His congregation; "even their tenth generation shall not come into the congregation of Jehovah for ever," Deut. 23: 3.

But God's governmental dealings continued in the land of Moab. Elimelech died and also his two sons; no seed remained capable of taking up the inheritance. On the line of God's government all was lost, and there was no vestige of hope save in that pure sovereignty of goodness which caused God to act graciously for His people, not because of any deserving on their side, or any ability on their part to win back what had been departed from, but just because of what He was in Himself. It was wholly on this ground that Jehovah "visited his people to give them bread." And who could appreciate the tidings of this more than one who had learned in bitterness what it was to be alienated from the land, to be bereft and empty? Though Naomi was exiled, and bereft of all hope on the natural line, she still cherished Jehovah and the inheritance of Israel in her heart, so that as soon as she heard of His gracious visitation of His people it set her in movement. She yearned for good that had been known in the past; Jehovah and His land were still precious and attractive to her heart; and He honoured her by making her and her hopes attractive to Ruth. What came out in Ruth was the precious fruit, through divine working, of what she had learned of Jehovah through those who cherished His Name amidst sorrowful circumstances.

Ruth came in as having no claim at all, for she was a Moabitess, but as one who had learned that it was blessed to trust under the wings of the God of Israel. If God's own people had forfeited the inheritance through lack of love

for Him there was encouragement to believe that even a Moabite who loved Him would be graciously received. He would welcome a lover whatever the past history of that lover might have been! She and Naomi were both widows; there was no seed to inherit; the succession had apparently hopelessly failed. Then what remained? The attraction of Jehovah, the link with His people, all that had been brought to her, and represented to her, by those who loved Jehovah, though in exile and bereavement under His hand.

Ruth was prepared to give up natural hopes in order to have part with the people of God even in sorrow and affliction. There were no outward prospects of any kind to attract her. Hers was a purely spiritual affection for that which in widowhood and sorrow had become more to her heart than the people and country and gods of Moab. Spiritual affections—awakened in a heart that had no claim of any kind—led her to break away from everything that was not of God, and to come to take refuge under His wings. In her father-in-law she had learned—may we not say?—how kingly was Israel's God, how far above the degraded Chemosh of the Moabites, whose worship consisted in the grossest impurities. In her husband Mahlon (mild) she had learned to appreciate a character which became more attractive to her than the arrogance of Moab, Isa. 16: 6. She had dealt kindly with the dead—evidently as appreciating what was set forth in them—and this was a characteristic which only needed following up to bring her to full blessing. Then she had learned in Naomi how to value the God-given inheritance by seeing the deep exercises of one who had left it, and who was submitting in sorrow to the action of God's government, feeling the loss of the inheritance, but cherishing in her heart the thought of redemption. All this was binding her heart to Jehovah and to His people; it was forming her in new affections and desires, so that in the appreciation of what was of God she had really become a stranger in Moab.

Ruth's ardent affection knit her to what was of God,

even when it was found in exercise and sorrow. Anything that is distinctively of God to-day will be found with those who are humble and contrite in heart, and who are marked by exercise and brokenness of spirit, for we are in a day of great departure and weakness and it is right to feel this. Have we kindly feelings towards what is of God? There is hope for love wherever it exists; a Moabite with love for Jehovah is infinitely better than an Israelite without it. Love gets wondrous things now. See John 14: 15—23. The exercises of Naomi and the affections of Ruth were both found in the woman of Luke 7: 36—50; she "loved much"; she was not only a believer but a lover; it was love that brought her to the Pharisee's house and to the feet of Jesus; and how truly did she find in Him the "mighty man of wealth"!

Orpah is a solemn warning, for she seemed to make as good a start as Ruth, but the love that never fails was not there, and she stopped short and went back to her people and her gods; she missed all that Ruth got. We may be affected and moved to a certain extent by being in contact with the people of God, and yet, when it comes to a final test, we may go back. Orpah drew back to perdition, but Ruth, speaking typically, got eternal life.

It is well to remember that Ruth was not attracted first to Boaz, but to Naomi. It was not the "mighty man of wealth" that allured her from Moab to Bethlehem, but what she had learned of God from a poor widow sorrowing under the dealings of God, but cherishing her place amongst His people even in her days of departure and mourning. "Ruth clave to her." We have all been touched by the depth and sincerity of her declaration: "Do not intreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part me and thee," verses 16, 17. There

was still "pleasantness" about Naomi to Ruth's heart, for she was a lover of Jehovah, and her heart was in Bethlehem though her steps had been for years in the far-off fields of Moab. If Ruth had not seen and been attracted by what was of God in Naomi she would not have followed her from Moab to Bethlehem, and she would never have known Boaz, or been known by him. She reached Boaz as the result of being bound up in affection with what was of God as found in sorrow and weakness here. The things of God often come to us first in a very humble guise. Are those who love God attractive to us? Do we delight to go with them in their exercises, in their spiritual movements? If so we shall surely be brought to the true Boaz. Naomi represents that state of heart which takes account of all the departure from God's thoughts, and feels the sorrow of it. Speaking assembly-wise we can look back to the time when we had first-love and did first works, and enjoyed the inheritance; but we have to feel how different it is now. But God has gracious thoughts of recovery and restoration. This is necessarily an individual matter, but individual recovery always has in view, from God's side, recovery of assembly character. God does not despise anyone who feels things rightly before Him. He delights in recovery. The Christian profession, as a whole, will end its course in apostasy, but there are those who, like Naomi, feel the state of things, and in Ruth we see sensibilities that are awakened to appreciate what is of God by coming in contact with them. Ruth's heart was open to the spiritual impressions that reached her. How suitable is all this in view of recovery to what is in God's mind for His people!

Sorrowful exercises in Naomi and ardent affection in Ruth moved together from the fields of Moab and came to Bethlehem. But we must not forget that what started the movement was neither in Naomi nor in Ruth, but in Jehovah. "Jehovah had visited his people to give them bread." It was the report of this that set them in motion. And there is a similar grace on His part to-day. The

departure is manifest, and it is right to feel it, but the thoughts of God are unchanged, and the inheritance is as much in His heart for His people as it ever was. And in these last days God has, indeed, visited His people to give them bread. It is a time of extraordinary contrasts. On one side there is lack of spirituality, worldliness, self-seeking, every man doing what is right in his own eyes. But on another side wonderful and blessed divine movements. It would hardly be saying too much if we affirmed that there is more bread available for the people of God to-day than there has been at any time since the days of the apostles. The question for each one of us is, Are we interested? Is the inheritance, and the bread divinely given, attractive enough to draw us out of Moab, and to bring us to Bethlehem? If so, we shall find that it is "the beginning of the barley harvest." The barley harvest is figurative of what is connected with Christ as the risen One. God is giving to His people what is precious and nourishing. As the Sheaf of first-fruits, Christ has been waved in resurrection, and what is secured in Him lies outside the region of either individual failure or assembly failure. It is all the product of divine grace and working. Christ is, indeed, the Mighty Man of wealth; He is the true Boaz—in Him is strength. We find afterwards that Ruth kept with the maidens of Boaz until the end of the wheat harvest; the wheat harvest has reference to the saints as after the order of Christ; it brings in, typically, the assembly.

CHAPTER 2

It is important for the good and joy of our souls that we should apprehend Christ in a definite and personal way as the Kinsman who has the right of redemption. He is the Kinsman, in infinite grace, of every soul that is exercised in the fear of God. Wherever there is the true owning of

the rights of God, Christ can be claimed as Kinsman. Elimelech being dead, and Mahlon and Chilion being dead also, made it clear that they could not take up the inheritance. Everything was hopeless unless there should be one with the right of redemption, and with willingness and ability to exercise that right. The hopelessness of everything on man's side is set forth in the death of the three men; the exercises that are becoming under such circumstances are seen in Naomi; divinely awakened interest and desire appear in Ruth. But the meeting of those exercises, and the satisfaction of those desires, is seen to depend on the kinsman with the right of redemption. It is a beautiful picture of how Israel will be shut up to Christ to secure all that is in their inheritance, and it is not less beautiful as portraying how—notwithstanding individual and collective failure—the inheritance can be enjoyed to-day.

God would call our attention to One who holds and enjoys all that is the portion of man according to the thoughts of divine love. A living glorious Man at the right hand of God is in possession of all that it was in divine purpose to bestow upon men, and He is such a Kinsman with the right of redemption that He can bring us into it. All the wealth and blessedness of what God has purposed for men as the subjects of His love and calling, is substantiated in Christ as the risen and glorified One, and eternally secured there. In being brought to Christ we are brought to the true Boaz, in whom is strength to hold all that God would give to men, and who holds it in such a way that it becomes available for us. He has "the right of our redemption." This applies particularly to a day when the divinely allotted portion has been lost as to present enjoyment. For that is the point of view in the book of Ruth.

It comes to light that Naomi has "a relation of her husband's," and though SHE was impoverished, HE was "a mighty man of wealth." This brings out, typically, the

who would rather have Him, and the blessing of God in Him, than all the wealth and honour or good that the world can offer! He says of such, "I will observe him." The book of Ruth is largely a history, typically, of movements of affection on our side, and of diligence in the pursuit of what is spiritual.

Ruth was not only a gleaner of the blessing of God, but a diligent gleaner. "She came, and has continued from the morning until now; her sitting in the house has been little as yet," verse 7. I have no doubt the Spirit reports to Christ just how we are acting with reference to His things—the true measure of our interest and diligence. I have found that even a small measure of interest in God's things secures blessing, and perhaps none of us knows what wealth we might have secured if we had manifested greater diligence in the pursuit of spiritual things.

We may glean in all that belongs to Christ. Ruth gets every encouragement from Boaz and his servants. He speaks directly to her for personal comfort, verse 8. He encourages her to continue and "not to glean in another field." He says, "Let thine eyes be on the field which is being reaped, and go thou after them." The Lord loves to be recognised as the Director of operations in His own fields, and wherever His young men and maidens are at work is the place to keep our eyes on. It is good to follow up the reaping and the gleaning of the present day. The wealth of the inheritance is being reaped to-day in mutual co-operation; the young men and the maidens are working together. The young men represent the energy that apprehends spiritual things and makes the good of the inheritance available. This was seen in the apostles first, and it is seen in a subordinate degree in all the gifts of the ascended Christ. The maidens would represent a subjective state that follows up what is ministered, and seeks through exercise that it shall be formative in us. It is good to be in company with that.

Ruth was made welcome to glean, and to drink of what

the young men drew. This latter, as being in "vessels," would appear to typify what is standing ready to be used at any time for spiritual refreshment. The Holy Scriptures take the first place as such a store, and there is also much that is permanently available in the way of printed ministry. There are vessels from which we are welcome to drink, and which are open to be used by every humble Ruth who gleans in the field of the true Boaz. Indeed, the whole wealth of the inheritance is open to us as when the Holy Spirit came down from a glorified Christ. Love can have everything. The last verse of the epistle to the Ephesians—which is the epistle of our inheritance—intimates to us that love gives access to everything. "Grace with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption."

Ruth's own feeling was that she was a stranger, verse 10, but to the eye of Boaz her affectionate link with what was new to her was her distinguishing feature. She had severed herself from what was of Moab, and had identified herself with what was of God, though she had only known it in exile. She had been moved in heart to come and take refuge under the wings of Jehovah; Boaz had pleasure in her; she obtained personal recognition from him. It is a precious moment in the soul's history when we have the consciousness for the first time of Christ's personal recognition, and can say, I am altogether unworthy, but I desire the blessing of God, and the Lord has taken knowledge of me! As Naomi said, "Blessed be he that did regard thee," verse 19. Ruth got direct comfort from Boaz as he spoke to her heart, though she had a deep sense that she was not like one of his hand-maidens.

Then "mealtime" comes, verse 14, and it brings special marks of favour. Boaz provides for his young men and maidens, and Ruth learns how he cares for them, and what provision his wealth affords. But what THEY have SHE can have; his heart and his hand are as open to her as to them, all unworthy as she felt herself to be. It was

all HIS favour—the thoughts of HIS heart. There is such a thing as "mealtime" now, when the reapers and the maidens sit down to eat and to drink. It speaks of the fellowship that is available through the grace of our Lord. No one comes spiritually into it save by His invitation. Many stand off as feeling unworthy, but this is, at the bottom, unreadiness to owe all to Him. In partaking of what HE provides, the humblest self-judged soul can sit, by His invitation, beside the reapers. Such have equal right with the greatest labourers in His harvest, for it is the right of Christ to call them all to partake of what His grace gives. So, after Pentecost, "they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles." They all "sat beside the reapers," and they knew something of what it was to receive "parched corn" from the hand of a risen and exalted Christ, for it was Himself in heaven who had now become their food. The history of Ruth shows how a soul comes into fellowship as led by affectionate desires, and as welcomed by the Lord Himself.

The bread and the vinegar represent what can be enjoyed in common in Christian fellowship. There is a portion covered by the term "the Lord's table" of which it is our privilege to partake; it is provided for all His saints. Practically, as to enjoyment, it is only reached as we, like Ruth, choose the good part. At the present day things are reached experimentally by way of love that seeks them. This is illustrated in the two who heard John speak, and who followed Jesus. He said to them, "What seek ye? And they said to him, Rabbi . . . where abidest thou? He says to them, Come and see," John 1: 38, 39.

The "parched corn" of verse 14, and the ears drawn out, of verse 16, represent what is in excess of the general supply; they are marks of personal favour. Every Ruth will get something that is not quite of a general character. The fellowship is general, but manifestations of the Lord are personal; it is the lover who gets them; John 14. There are many sweet expressions of the Lord's favour which are

not general. For instance, the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Phil. 1: 19, is only known to the one who gets it. "The Lord stood with me, and gave me power," 2 Tim. 4: 17, was very personal to Paul, and so was "My grace suffices thee," 2 Cor. 12: 9. And the Lord speaks of a "white stone" and on it a "new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it," Rev. 2: 17. The Lord loves to give personal marks of favour and support. Such do not remain solely in result for our own enjoyment. Ruth ate the parched corn "and was sufficed, and reserved some" which she took home to her mother-in-law. Paul's experiences of personal favour were a great encouragement to him in his soul and service, but he has spoken of them to encourage us, and that we might look for personal favours also. We should covet to receive marks of the love and favour of Christ, so that the sense of His personal regard is in our hearts; we are not sustained altogether by what is general, but we have our personal secret with Him. The tendency is to live solely upon what is general, but love would not be satisfied with this; it appreciates what is general, but it has its own special delight in what is given as personal favour.

Ruth gleaned, and she beat out what she had gleaned. She was marked by intense diligence in the acquisition of all that grace put within her reach. And then she learned that Boaz was "near of kin," and that he was one who had the right of redemption. The one who had so graciously regarded her, and shown his personal favour to her, was one who had right to secure everything for her that her heart desired. She was now getting, typically, an enlarged view of Christ—a dawning apprehension of the possibility of a more intimate personal link with Him than she had ever contemplated.

The great thought that underlies the book of Ruth is that spiritual affections are brought into rest; satisfied love is the subject of the book. Both Ruth and Boaz were brought to rest through realising the thoughts of God as

set forth in Leviticus 25: 25—27 and Deuteronomy 25: 5, 6. God's love would not be in rest if what He has given were not enjoyed. Hence if poverty or death came in on the heirs, God had a reserve in the Kinsman-redeemer. He foresaw all that would come in, and Christ was His provision to meet it all. The inheritance was there, but in the mind of God it could only be taken up as redeemed. Naomi had no seed to inherit; her sons were dead; Israel was truly in that case morally as having no spiritual seed suitable to take up what was in the mind of God. Ruth, though a Moabitess, was the representative of the dead, but she could not claim the inheritance in her own right, nor secure a seed to hold it on behalf of her dead husband. If taken up at all the inheritance had to be taken up according to the ancient statute of the right of redemption. Israel never truly had the inheritance in any other way, and never will have.

This is a principle on which all can be secured that is for the pleasure of God and for the blessing of men, in spite of the fact that all has been departed from and forfeited on man's side. The right of redemption, as vested in Christ, will secure the reinstatement of Israel in a coming day when such exercises as were seen in Naomi, and such interest as was seen in Ruth, get a place with them. When the remnant commit themselves to Christ as Ruth did to Boaz He will exercise the right of redemption, and there will be a seed suited to inherit the promises. On the line of the natural all hope is dead, but through Christ all will be secured in a spiritual way for the glory of God. "He shall see a seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand," Isa. 53: 10.

CHAPTER 3

The conduct of Ruth in chapter 3 represents that of souls who have learned that all depends on Christ exercising in favour and power the right of redemption. She came, encouraged by the favour shown her, and by Naomi, to claim that he should exercise that right on her behalf. She would avail herself of God's provision in grace, conscious that as towards her all was unmerited favour, but yet having the moral suitability of "a woman of worth"; this was known in all "the gate of my people," verse 11. She came to Boaz as "winnowing barley in the threshing-floor," reminding us of Him "whose winnowing fan is in his hand, and he shall thoroughly purge his threshing-floor," Matt. 3: 12. He will get rid of all chaff; He will burn it with fire unquenchable; what is morally worthless will have no place with Him. It is better to be winnowed by Christ than to be sifted by Satan. Christ winnows to get rid of the chaff; Satan sifts that, if possible, he may get rid of the wheat. A "woman of worth" would come to light as being prepared to face all that is involved in the winnowing process, and such would be acceptable in His sight. Christ would displace all that is unsuitable to Himself. There may be a good deal that seems to be suitable, but when tested under threshing it is found to be but chaff which has to be eliminated. Ruth represents one who is prepared to be winnowed. And on her side, as washed, anointed, and robed, there were suitable moral conditions. For all such He can be counted upon to "shew thee what thou shalt do," and to "complete the matter this day."

It is striking that, as we have before remarked, Ruth takes the initiative in all this. The Spirit of God would bring prominently before us the fruit of His working, in that she moved affectionately and diligently after what was of God, and to acquire for herself all that was

available through His favour. Spiritual things are available to-day; Christ is available, the Holy Spirit is available, the inheritance is available; in a certain sense we may say that the assembly is available. Now have we the state of heart seen in Ruth which will go in wholeheartedly for all that is available? Christ would say to us, "I love those that love me; and they that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; durable wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than fine gold, yea, than pure gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I walk in the path of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasuries," Prov. 8: 17—21.

Lowliness, subjection and modesty were seen in Ruth; she had beautiful moral qualities, but, withal, a state of heart that would miss nothing which divine goodness and wealth put within her reach. She got every encouragement from Boaz. "And now, my daughter, fear not; all that thou sayest will I do to thee"; and he gave her six measures of barley. She returned to Naomi enriched, and with evidence that she had his full approval in what she was pursuing. It is a comfort to know that the Lord Jesus recognises every spiritual desire, even in one who is not yet in full rest and liberty. Do you think it is nothing to Christ if one can really say, "I delight in the law of God according to the inward man?" How much more if there is distinct desire for Himself? To such a one He would give a distinct expression of His interest and concern, and a pledge that He will see the matter through. Such may be learning and feeling that they have no rights and no power, but the Lord has His eye upon them, and He will surely see the matter through, and bring their exercises to fruition. When we have no one before us but Christ, He says, "I will do everything for you."

When Ruth learned that the one who had been so gracious to her was a kinsman with the right of redemption she was encouraged to put herself in the place of one

who needed him, and who desired to be under his wing. She had then no more to do in the matter; it all rested with him. "Be still, my daughter . . . for the man will not rest until he have completed the matter this day." When a divinely taught soul has its affections powerfully drawn to what is of God, and has come to the apprehension of Christ as the Kinsman with the right of redemption, and is ready to avail itself of Him, the whole matter then rests with Him. Everything must be taken up in such a way that the honour of it belongs alone to Christ. He will act for those who love Him, and secure to them all that their hearts desire, even at such a time as we are living in. When affections move simply and whole-heartedly towards Christ He undertakes everything.

CHAPTER 4

But then we have to learn that nothing but Christ and a definite personal link with Him, will avail. We have to learn under divine teaching the utter inadequacy of the legal principle, and this is brought out typically in chapter 4. Man has the knowledge of good and evil, and conscience applies this to responsibility. Every man knows he ought to do what is good, and not to do what is evil. The law put that into formal shape, and held men definitely responsible to God for their actions and even their desires. This is represented by the one who had the prior claim in the case of Ruth; the law is nearer to us naturally than Christ. It is true that Gentiles have never been put under the law by God, but obligation to do what is right is upon all men by the knowledge of good and evil, and by conscience. Many of us have the light of Christianity as the standard of what we ought to be and do. The natural man would say, That is quite enough. Many would tell us we have only to use our inward perceptions and keep a good conscience, and we shall be all right! But we have to

learn that we have no power. The law, or any kind of obligation you can think of, cannot undertake to meet conditions which are exactly opposite to what they ought to be. That principle cannot do anything for a dead man so that his name shall be raised up upon his inheritance. If death has come in, the raising up of the name of the dead involves a power of life in Another on his behalf which is, typically, resurrection power, and it is such power that is in Christ as the true Boaz. The object of the statute in Deuteronomy 25: 5, 6, was that the inheritance might be secured to one upon whom death had come, "that his name be not blotted out from Israel." This was pure grace, acting in regard of one dead; the legal principle could do nothing in such a case. So the nearest kinsman—representing the law, or the legal principle—says, twice over, "I cannot redeem it." He drew off his sandal, as much as to say, I have no standing in such a case as this; I must give place to another.

Every one of us has to learn this lesson. The early part of Romans 7 gives the solution of the problem before showing us in detail in the latter part what the problem is; it is like a boy being given the answer to a sum before he is set to work it out. That is how grace would help us; we are shown that we have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, so that we might be to Another, even to Him who has been raised from the dead, that we may bear fruit to God. Then we are shown what bondage it is to be married to the first husband. Abigail had a similar exercise in getting freed, first in spirit and then actually, from a husband who was incapable of being what her heart needed, in order to be linked with one who was a satisfying husband.

The nearer kinsman could not undertake what was really needed; he could not take up Ruth, nor bring in a seed to inherit when death had come in. I may feel as a Christian that my ways and spirit should be this or that, but this does not give power. Power is in Christ; without

Him we can do nothing, but having Him there is sufficiency to achieve everything.

The gate of the city would suggest a definite public witness to what Christ has become to those who love Him. There are no people in the world so much observed as Christians; they are in the "gate"; the eyes of the world are fixed on them. Do they see clearly that we have a mighty and wealthy Husband—One who has set us in rest from selfishness, worldliness, and earthly mindedness, so that servants and worshippers of God are really brought forth?

Boaz is a type of Christ as risen. He alone, in the true and divine sense, has the right of redemption. He has secured the inheritance, not only by personal title as the Heir, but in view of our having it with Him He has established a title by purchase; it is an "acquired possession," Eph. 1: 14. He holds it by an unquestionable title for He has discharged every claim upon it and made it His own. The precious thoughts of divine love in all their fulness could not be held by any other; in this regard Israel, and the Gentiles too, are "the dead." If their names are raised up upon the inheritance it must be in virtue of the power of life in Another which acts in grace towards them. All that God has in love purposed for man is held by Christ in the strength of resurrection, and it becomes the portion of those who, like Ruth, come to Him, and are married to Him. "The sure mercies of David" are the wealth and fatness of the inheritance, and they are all secured in Christ risen.

When the remnant of Israel find death upon them they will go through the bitterness that Naomi knew, and this will be accompanied by affectionate desires after Jehovah such as were seen in Ruth, but both will find their satisfying answer in being brought to their Messiah, known as having been in death for them, but now in risen strength to hold everything from God for them.

And if, like Israel, the saints of the present period have

lost the possession and enjoyment of their God-given portion, the way is open for Naomis and Ruths to return, and to find that a Kinsman lives who delights to secure to them in Himself as risen and glorified all the wealth that they have departed from. This book belongs to the time of the judges; that is, it stands in relation to a time of failure and departure. It shows how love will reach Christ and find Him sufficient for everything—sufficient to secure the enjoyment of the inheritance for us, sufficient to answer perfectly every affectionate desire for what is of God, sufficient, by giving us the Spirit, to constitute us suitable heirs. In Romans 8 we see that saints are suitable to inherit; they are sons and children, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ; the living seed is there. Estates fall into Chancery when there is no heir whose title can be established. Without heirs the inheritance would lapse; God's thought would be invalidated. This could never be, and the effect of reaching Christ as the true Boaz, and being married to Him, is that a seed is secured that is not under death, but which is capable of enjoying the inheritance. A son is born, chapter 4: 13, who has the right of redemption, for the women said, "Blessed be Jehovah who hath not left thee this day without one that has the right of redemption, and may his name be famous in Israel," verse 14. This refers to Obed, the son brought forth. It is a beautiful and interesting suggestion; the right of redemption is clearly viewed in two different ways. As attaching to Boaz it is typical of what is available in Christ as the Kinsman. But as attaching to Obed (Worshipper or Servant) it is typical of what comes to pass in the saints as the result of being brought in affection to Christ, and married to Him according to Romans 7: 4. The right of redemption becomes practically valid in the saints as they bring forth fruit to God in service and worship. Not only are things secured on God's side in Christ, but He brings about conditions on our side that are suitable in living heirs. A seed comes in that has

manifestly right to the inheritance, having such a character as the children of God that they are suitable to be His heirs and Christ's joint-heirs. This is the result of the work of God in His saints; it is brought out, as to the teaching of it, in Romans 8.

I do not doubt that the Spirit of God would give present application to the teaching of this book. The general state of things to-day is the evidence that the people of God are in the fields of Moab rather than in Bethlehem. Death has come in, for the Lord says to Protestantism, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead," Rev. 3: 1. But Christ is great enough to bring in life where death has been. If God has assigned a portion to His saints He is glorified in their being in possession of it, and enjoying it, and bringing forth its fruits. He is not glorified by there being famine in the land, and by His people being in Moab. Such a state of things is to say publicly that Moab is a better place than Canaan! When Christians turn to the world and to earthly things their condition is such as to say publicly that these things are better than what God gives. I am sure that none of us would like to continue to give such a testimony as that.

But through the rich grace of our God there is opportunity for any who are in such a condition to feel it and own it, as Naomi did. And if hearts are attracted to the blessing of God as Ruth's was the result will be that Christ will be known and reached as the Mighty Man of wealth. He will be known as the source of everything, the Restorer of all that was in God's original thought for His people, for all is secured and maintained in Him. And as saints abide in Him they become capable of taking up the inheritance. If Christ is in the saints, and the Spirit is life, the right of redemption is secured morally in them.

The reason why many fail to enjoy the inheritance is that they have never realised that they are not enjoying it; they lack the deep exercises seen in Naomi. Their spiritual standard is low; they believe that their sins are

forgiven, and that they will go to heaven when they die or when the Lord comes, but they have very little conception that there is a vast wealth of spiritual blessing which they might be enjoying now. On the other hand, how often is there a lack of affectionate interest in God's things such as was seen in Ruth. She had never personally been in the land, so that she could not have quite the sense of having departed from it. Perhaps many of us have opportunity to come into things as she did. Under the influence of Naomi her affections went out fully to what was of God. If this is so with us it will lead to reaching Him who can fully secure to us the blessedness of the inheritance. There is often desire at the bottom of the heart, but no definite purpose to go in for what is desired, and when this is the case there is danger of being diverted by all kinds of things that are not Christ.

When a personal link is established with Christ known as the Kinsman with the right of redemption the result will be a seed that is spiritually capable of entering upon and enjoying the inheritance. All is secured for possession and enjoyment on the principle of pure divine favour, and a raising up in resurrection power. This is the product of such exercises as are set forth in Naomi; the son is said to be born to Naomi. But it comes in also in answer to such affections and desires as are seen in Ruth.

Then Obed begets Jesse—Jah exists; we are brought into the changeless certainty of all the things which are of God. And it only remains that Christ shall come as the true David to publicly introduce the rights of God as King, and to give the heirs of promise their full place in the inheritance as known in conditions of glory.

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF EZRA

CHAPTER 1

We have been following the history of Israel and Judah down to the point when they were carried away captive on account of their departure from God. It is now thought well to read the books which speak of the return of a remnant from captivity. Jehovah had in mind that there should be recovery. He had been prophesying of it by His servants, and providing for it by His ways in government, even before the iniquity of His people had reached its height. In applying this to ourselves of the present period it is good to see that, while the Christian profession was following a downward course in the direction of apostasy, God had in His mind the thought of a remnant being brought back to the truth as it was in the beginning. The epistles to Sardis and Philadelphia both suggest movements of recovery, for Sardis is addressed as having "received and heard." There had been a divine giving and speaking which it was necessary to "keep" if the Lord's favour in so giving and speaking was to have a right response. This we believe to have reference to that part of the Christian profession which benefited so greatly by what is known as the Reformation, which was clearly on God's part a movement of recovery. Then Philadelphia is addressed as having a little power, and as having kept Christ's word, and as having not denied His name, and as having kept the word of His patience. It is evident that this implies recovery to that which was from the beginning, so that it speaks of true assembly conditions being found at the end so that Philadelphia becomes the subject of Christ's complacent love and commendation. This speaks to us of recovery as clearly as Jeremiah's prophecy spoke of seventy years being accomplished in the

desolations of Jerusalem. It was Daniel understanding by books the number of the years that led him to make confession of the sin of his people, and to cry so earnestly to Jehovah to cause His face to shine upon His sanctuary which was desolate, and to favour the city and the people that were called by His name, see Dan. 9: 1—19.

There was very little thought of what answered to Jerusalem or the house of God for many centuries, but over a hundred years ago God stirred up many hearts to pray, and to search the Scriptures, that they might return to what was in His mind—with regard to His saints ever since Pentecost, but which had been grievously departed from. God has no thought of setting up anything new; He would have all His saints to return to His original thoughts, in which they are all entitled by His grace to have part. All that is the outcome of the death of Christ, and that is connected with the presence of the Spirit here; all that is bound up with the lordship and headship of Christ, and that enters into the truth of the assembly and the service of God, is there for saints to return to if their spirits are stirred up to do so.

There was scripture to justify great expectations in the time of Daniel and Ezra, just as there was scripture to justify great expectations when the assembly revival began over a hundred years ago. I suppose there was also an intuitive sense that it would not be like God to leave things as they were until the rapture. For it was written that "the Spirit and the bride say, Come." This in itself would suggest that something would be found at the end having the true character of the bride, and able to say, Come, in concert with the Spirit. I have no doubt that this, apprehended either intelligently or intuitively, led many saints to cry to God to favour His people, and to move in restoring mercy so that a remnant might be recovered to the divine centre, and that the truth of the house of God and of the service of God might be set up again in the faith and love of His people after being

desolate in any spiritual sense for many centuries. I have no doubt that it was in answer to much exercise and prayer, founded upon the Scriptures, that God gave such a precious ministry of His own thoughts concerning Christ and the assembly more than a hundred years ago. This ministry, continued by His grace ever since, has stirred up many hearts, and encouraged many hearts, to return from what is really Babylonish captivity to have a part in the setting up of the true service of God in accord with the truth of the assembly. Where there is confession of departure and confidence in God that He will do something for His name and for His house, we may be sure that He will do something which answers in this day to what He did for His people in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. I think we can say, very humbly but very thankfully, that He has done so.

But the place which the kings of Persia had in relation to the return from captivity, and the rebuilding of the house and the city, is remarkable and instructive. We do well to take note of it, because there has been something similar in our day. The Persian monarchy represents generally an aspect of world power which God can make use of for the good of His people, and for the furtherance of what He has in His mind. Cyrus had been marked out, and even mentioned by name, long before he was born, as we may see in Isaiah 41: 2; 44: 28; 45: 1—5; 48: 14. Daniel, as having read his Bible, would know all about this; it would encourage his prayer greatly. If we paid more attention to our Bibles there would be more encouragement and power in our prayers. People who read Isaiah casually might have passed over what was said about Cyrus, but the right attitude of faith depended upon it being taken in. God had marked out a wonderful service for Cyrus, though He says that Cyrus did not know Him. He was made to contribute in a wonderful way to the building of God's house and of the holy city.

I am afraid we do not think sufficiently of how God has moved in His government of the world in order to make a way for His people to return from Babylonish captivity. In certain countries, at any rate, God has brought about conditions in the world which are favourable to the return from captivity of all those whose spirit is stirred up in relation to His house. God foresaw what He was about to do in a spiritual way, and in restoring mercy to His people, and He made provision for it in His ordering of human events. A certain liberation has been granted in this and other lands, so that the world power does not hinder; it gives liberty for the working out in a practical way of what is in the mind of God. Not very long since we might, according to the law of this land, have been put in prison or punished severely if we had not conformed to that order of religious service which the world approved. But God has moved in the sphere of political things, and He has brought about conditions which give liberty for spiritual movements. Not a single saint, in England at any rate, is hindered by the world power from returning to the divine centre, or from working out with his brethren the truth of the house of God. No one is held captive in Babylon by the political powers that are in authority in the world. This is an immense favour from God which has been brought about by His faithfulness, and it is also the answer to the faithfulness and prayers of a remnant of His people. God knew centuries ago what He was going to do; He had in mind to deliver His people from an order of things which was really Babylonish, and to bring them back to the truth of the assembly, so that His service might be carried on in a spritual way. And He has ordered things politically in view of this. But getting the gain of it is dependent upon spiritual conditions being maintained in the hearts of the saints. The liberty granted to us has come about through many exercises and prayers and sufferings of the people of God, and if we become lax spiritually we cannot count on a continuance of

liberty.

The Lord speaks to Philadelphia as the One who "has the key of David, he who opens and no one shall shut, and shuts and no one shall open." And He says, "behold, I have set before thee an opened door, which no one can shut, because thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." The opened door is conditional upon His word being kept and His name confessed. If the conditions are present on our side the Lord will undoubtedly exercise His power as having the key of David to open the door and keep it open. If saints are ready to move spiritually the Lord will see to it that there is an opened door before them.

A great system of bondage has been set up, but there is liberty to get out of it. If believers are found listening to the preaching of unconverted men it is a terrible bondage. If one who knows in his own soul the liberty of the Spirit of sonship has to take part in an ordered service in which that Spirit has no place, he is in captivity. A system of things which is designed to go on without the Spirit of God, and does go on without Him, can only be bondage to one who knows that all his relations with God are in the Spirit, and that he can only worship by the Spirit of God. God feels the captivity of His people, and He has made provision for their liberation. "Whosoever there is among you of all his people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Jehovah the God of Israel—he is God—which is at Jerusalem." It is important to understand that the service of God can only go on in the place where He has set His name. There can be no service of God in Babylon; His house must be built at Jerusalem. The great thoughts of God, taken up in our affections, will liberate us from what is Babylonish and what is sectarian, or what is marked by independency.

Jerusalem and the house of God, as applied spiritually to ourselves, represent what is universal. There are great

spiritual realities existent today which are to be recognised by faith and love, and as they are recognised the people of God move away from captivity into liberty. Jesus has died that "he should also gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad." As born of God His children are one family, and they are all indwelt by one Spirit in whose power they are all baptised into one body. Christ has formed Jew and gentile in Himself into one new man, and in Him "all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom *ye* also" (gentiles) "are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." So that believers who are of the gentiles are "joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings." Those born of God, who receive Christ by believing on His name, have part in common in the wondrous results of the death of Christ; they have all received the same Holy Spirit; and through Christ they have all access by one Spirit to the Father. But all this belongs to Jerusalem; it cannot be known or enjoyed in Babylon. Babylon is the current system of religion according to which the children of God and those who are of the world join together in what is supposed to be the service of God. But everything that is of God is brought into captivity in such a system. Those who are of the world cannot join, except in a most unreal way, in utterances that would be suitable for the children of God. And the children of God who are happy in His love and favour cannot feel that language which expresses the experience of distance and unsuitability to God is fitting for them to use. It is impossible for the world lying in the wicked one and the sons of God accepted in Christ to take common ground before God. To attempt to do so is to bring all that is of God into bondage. The divine nature finds its liberty in conditions of holiness, truth, love, divine order and spirituality. But these things are found in Jerusalem, not in Babylon. How could the heavenly character of the assembly or the truth of

Christ's Headship be known in an earthly system? How could the saints be together as the brethren of Christ, or in the conscious joy of sonship before God, in a system of things which keeps them on the ground of being men in the flesh? All the principles which govern the fellowship of saints, the truth of the assembly, and its divine order and functioning as set forth in 1 Corinthians and in the epistles to Timothy, are all unknown in what answers to Babylon today. For all that is connected spiritually with God's name, and with the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must leave Babylon and come to Jerusalem. Divine order and worship in spirit and truth canot be found in any human system. They cannot be taken up in any sectarian or independent position. These things stand connected with Jerusalem and the house; they will only be understood as the people of God use their liberty to return from Babylonish captivity.

No doubt there is spiritual wealth in Babylon at the present time, and many precious vessels that really belong to the house of God, but they are enriching and adorning the wrong city. They are not available for service there. They are all wanted for the house at Jerusalem, but to get them there God has to stir up the spirits of His people. "And the chief fathers of Judah and Benjamin rose up, and the priests, and the Levites, even all those whose spirit God had stirred, to go up to build the house of Jehovah which is at Jerusalem." The "chief fathers" would be those who are prepared to carry responsibility. Without such persons there can be no effective movement. Many have enough light to know that they are not where they ought to be, but they shrink from responsibility in the matter, and remain in captivity. It is requisite that a spiritual lead should be given, and we can thank God that it has been given. None of us now has to step out on an untrodden path; we, like the Hebrews, have had spiritual leaders who have spoken to us the word of God, and who by their faith have marked out the path of

liberty, and where the service of God can go on according to His mind. We might become acquainted with such if we are interested, and we might perhaps find some in our own locality who are moving in the direction of Jerusalem and the house of God. It is well to seek the company of such, and to move with them.

Priests and levites were found amongst those who went up, which brings out the fact that the service of God was in view. It would be essential in any movement of recovery today that there should be priestly and levitical elements present. That is, consideration for God and a readiness to take up spiritual labour in relation to His service, and for the good of His people. We may find these elements today, perhaps in persons not of much account in this world.

"And king Cyrus brought forth the vessels of the house of Jehovah . . . by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine-and-twenty knives, thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand four hundred. The whole did Sheshbazzar bring up, when they of the captivity were brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem." The vessels of service now are persons, the gold representing what the saints are as subjects of the work of God, and the silver speaking of what they are as standing in the value of a divine redemption. The saints are very precious vessels as wrought of God and carrying the features and qualities of new creation. It is possible for us to set aside in our minds all that we are naturally, or according to the flesh, and think of ourselves according to what we are by the grace and work of God. We then arrive at a true thought of what we are as vessels of gold. Then we may think of ourselves as redeemed ones, having our place before God in Christ as the fruit of that great

redemption which He has accomplished on the cross. We shall become God's righteousness in Him eternally on the ground that He has been made sin for us. The thought of redemption brings into relief all that was accomplished when our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for us. It is due to Him that we should be silver vessels for the service of the house of God.

Then we should gather that "chargers" and "basons" would be fairly large vessels, and they would suggest great capacity for the service of God. Why should we be content to be small vessels? Why not pray for enlargement that God may be more worthily served? Surely we should all desire this. 2 Timothy goes along with this, and contemplates the vessels as being "sanctified" and "serviceable." How careful we should be to preserve ourselves so that nothing shall be allowed that would unfit us for the holy service of the house of God! The vessels were all counted out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah; as of the royal line he was the one best fitted to take charge of them. He may be looked at as a type of Christ, but I think generally in this book he is viewed as taking a lead in the responsible service, and that he would represent princely features in the saints rendering them able to take up a divine trust. The "basons" of gold and silver referred to appear to have been dishes with covers, see 1 Chron. 28: 17 and note; this would suggest that there are times when the saints have to hold themselves as covered vessels. The contaminations of the world have to be carefully excluded. But in actual service in the house the covers would be removed. We do not expect that a brother will cover up in the assembly what he has in his heart. It is the time then for the covers to be taken off so that God may be served and the saints helped in their approach to Him by what a brother has. Many keep the covers on when they should be taken off, and God is robbed of what is His due, and the worship suffers generally by something being covered up in the heart that

ought to be brought into view. It is possible for what may be thought to be modesty and a retiring spirit to put a vessel of service out of action in the house of God. Let us see to it that the covers are not on when they should be off!

CHAPTER 2

We have seen that Jerusalem and the house of God represent what is universal, and cannot possibly be connected with what is sectional or sectarian, or what may be attached to some particular nation. All saints are called to blessing in Christ, and as having received one Spirit they are one body. They are all partakers of the heavenly calling and are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. The whole circle of what is spiritual is marked by unity. I think every true believer would admit this.

But in chapter 2 different localities are brought distinctly into view: "every one to his city," v. 1; "all Israel in their cities," v. 70. We know that some of the names mentioned in verses 3 to 35 are names of cities, and it is probable that they all are, or, if individuals, that they are viewed as characterising certain localities. So that this chapter, viewing the people in their cities, suggests the thought of the saints as found in local assemblies. As we come in our souls to the great spiritual realities which are universal, we come under obligation to work them out in some practical way in the localities where God has placed us. We realise that we must walk with our brethren locally in the recognition of the great matters which have become known to us as the truth of God, and which, by His grace, we esteem more highly than anything else. Our hearts have been stirred up by God to value what is of Himself. We should all be exercised that this shall be a reality to us—that we have not simply drifted into certain

associations because our parents were there, or a few other people that we like, or even because we got some blessing there. We might have got some blessing at a church or a chapel, but that would not make it Jerusalem or the house of God. We have to learn what is of God from the Scriptures, and as divinely taught, and then be set to work it out with others who value it as we do in the locality where we live.

It should be a definite thing with us that we have something before us that is universal in character. We shall then not be occupied unduly with persons, though we shall greatly value those who help us in the apprehension of the great thoughts of God. But we shall not be turned aside from pursuing those thoughts even if we see others failing to do so. If I feel disappointed with some of those who are available to walk with, I should consider that it is very possible that they might have reason sometimes to be disappointed with me! But however this may be, let us not get away from the great thoughts of God—the great realities of God. If we have Jerusalem and the house before us we shall find that there are others who think of these things, and who love them, and desire to follow them up as much as we do. These great things are not known in Babylon; they could not be known there. God has been pleased to put them amongst a poor and afflicted people, of no account in the world, because He wishes to attract hearts purely to what is of Himself, and not to what has importance in the eyes of men. Is it not an immense favour to be permitted to walk with a few feeble saints whose only attraction or importance is that they value the precious things of God, and seek to be in practical accord with what He has taught them? Saints can walk together on that principle, in separation from all that is unrighteous, and all that which is inconsistent with the truth of God *is* unrighteous. There can be no liberty to carry on the service of God in these last days save as we withdraw from what is not right, and pursue righteousness,

faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But this has to be worked out in each locality where we are found by the ordering of God. We are all children of some place, even as we read of some in this chapter that they were "children of Bethlehem," "children of Jericho," and of others that they were "men of Netophah," "men of Anathoth," "men of Bethel and Ai," and so on. We are all set in localities where we have to maintain with our fellow saints what is in accord with the mind of God. What Paul writes in 1 Corinthians is expressly said to be "the Lord's commandment," and it is addressed to "all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is the mind of God that the great truth of that epistle should be worked out practically in every locality where saints are found.

The different classes referred to in Ezra 2—priests, levites, singers, doorkeepers, Nethinim—represent different kinds of service which are essential if the house of God is to be set up according to the divine order. It is for each one to be exercised to know what he or she is called to be or to do. Some services require greater spirituality than others, or a greater degree of spiritual power, and while we ought all to desire to serve in the best possible way, we should be careful not to attempt to take up a service for which we are not spiritually qualified. To be one of the Nethinim was to be in a subordinate position, but it would be better to serve acceptably in that position, as called of God to do so, than to attempt to fill a higher position without being qualified to do so. The apostle would have this in mind when he says, "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all in possession of miraculous powers? have all gifts of healings? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" 1 Cor. 12: 29, 30. That is to say, You must not think that you can be what you like; you must accept the divine grading in service, even while desiring earnestly the greater gifts. The gifts referred to in 1 Corinthians 12: 28—30 are not conferred with the

object of making the persons prominent who have them, though in a certain sense they do this. They are set by God in the assembly on His own account, that He may be made prominent in the assembly. They are really representative of God, and stand connected with His dwelling here in His assembly which is His house.

It is very helpful to go carefully through the first epistle to the Corinthians, and observe how the thought of what is universal runs through it. For example, "the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord," chap. 1: 9, is clearly a universal fellowship. No one could think of it being merely local. The calling of God, the foundation, Jesus Christ, laid by Paul, the temple of God, the communion of the blood of the Christ and of His body, the baptism by one Spirit into one body, the assembly as that in which God has set the gifts mentioned in chapter 12: 28, are all universal thoughts. They are connected in that sense with Jerusalem, but they are all brought to bear upon the local assembly in Corinth, and in every place where there might be an assembly of saints, so that in our various "cities" we are continually governed by the thought of what is universal as set forth in Jerusalem. The thought of independent local assemblies is entirely foreign to Scripture, and has been much used by Satan to neutralise the Spirit's ministry of the truth of the assembly as the body of Christ and the house of God. All Israel dwelt "in their cities," but their thoughts all centred in Jerusalem and in the house of Jehovah. If our local position is not governed by truth and principles which are universal, we are sure to become independent, and to lose sight of what is vital to the present testimony of God. Let us all see to it that we begin by considering first for God and for His house, and that His worship may really go on in spirit and truth.

It is well to be reminded that all assembly administration is local. Discipline upon evil, fellowship meetings, and arrangements in regard of ministry are all matters of local assembly administration. There is great scope for

the activity of love in these and other matters as taken up on the principle of local responsibility.

There were certain amongst those who returned who "could not shew their fathers' house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel." And some of the priests "sought their genealogical register, but they were not found; therefore were they, as polluted, removed from the priesthood. And the Tirshatha said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim." There had been culpable carelessness about the fundamental principle on which the people held their inheritance from God, or on which priestly services could be rightly rendered to God. Seventy years in Babylon—to say nothing of the sad state which had preceded the captivity—had weakened the thought of the inheritance and the thought of priestly privilege in their hearts. They had not thought it worth while to keep up their genealogical registers, on which all depended, whether for an Israelite or a priest. They had really become profane in their thoughts, like Esau; they did not attach value to the greatest privileges that man favoured of God in that day could enjoy. It is sad to think that this may have its counterpart to-day. If we do not value the inheritance or the priesthood sufficiently to keep up the condition in which alone they can be enjoyed, we lose title to them in a practical sense. Not that God's thoughts change or fail, but if we cease to value them we lose title to them in our own consciousness. It is not said that these people were not of Israel, but that they could not show whether they were of Israel. In God's mind the genealogy of each of them was perfectly known, but *they* could not show it. This was the sad result of a prolonged course of indifference to the most precious divine giving that was known in that day. The "prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" is not to be won by careless or spiritually lazy persons. The inheritance will not be enjoyed by those who do not appreciate it. One serious

result of being in Babylon is that persons lose interest in the portion of the saints in light; they mind earthly things; and when things come to be examined in the light of Jerusalem they have no divinely attested pedigree. A large number of those who profess to be Christians can only be regarded as doubtful cases. We prove our genealogy to-day by departing from iniquity, and following righteousness, faith, love, peace with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

It was true also of certain of the children of the priests that they could not find their genealogical register. "Therefore were they, as polluted, removed from the priesthood." How many of God's priests to-day have been so careless about their priesthood and service that, in a practical sense, they have forfeited their title! How many have, in a practical sense removed themselves from the priesthood: many are in associations which render them incapable of serving in a priestly way. But they are all wanted for the service of the house of God, and there is a beautiful suggestion in this scripture that even such persons may have their priestly title restored. If a priest stands up with Urim and with Thummim everything will be divinely discerned, and every true priest will be set at liberty to "eat of the most holy things." Is it not our joy to know that such a Priest has stood up? In a coming day God's earthly people will be utterly unable to establish any title to blessing on their side. They will have no genealogies, or if they had, they would be worthless to secure them the fulfilment of the promises. They will have to bless themselves in Christ; Ps. 72: 17. They will only have hope or title because their rejected Messiah has died for them, and lives again to be the security of all those blessings which they have forfeited by their unbelief. Priesthood will be seen to attach to Christ, and only those will be priests whom He discerns to be kindred with Him. The priests of that coming day will be clothed with righteousness and salvation, and Christ will own them as

His. It is not otherwise to-day; none are priests but those whom Christ owns to be such. The lights and perfections of God in the breastplate of Christ make sure the title of every true priest. If He does not account me a priest, no human ordination can make me one. But if He has made me a priest to His God and Father, Rev. 1: 6, the Urim and the Thummim can only confirm what He has done. No one is entitled to "eat of the most holy things" who has not had to do personally with Christ and been accredited by Him. This raises a very necessary exercise amongst those who have returned from captivity. Those not accredited by Christ can only be regarded as "polluted." If He is our only title to blessing, if He is our righteousness and salvation, if we are morally separate from the world and the flesh, if we are marked by spiritual features, the Urim and the Thummim will confirm our priestly title. But who would care, or dare, to exercise the privileges of a priest without being sure that Christ had approved him as such? If I am not sure whether I am a priest or not, I must go to the Priest with Urim and Thummim. He will delight to assure me so that no uncertainty may remain in my heart. The all-important question is, How does Christ regard me? If He has made me a priest, and owns me as a priest, I must henceforth with holy care hold myself as a priest, and feed as a priest, and serve as a priest. The lesson of this passage is that among those who return from captivity there may be doubtful cases which can only be cleared up by having personally to do with Christ. If I am uncertain I cannot do anything with liberty. But all uncertainty can be ended by going to Christ. For if I am "polluted" He can show me what the pollution is, and He can cleanse me from it, or enable me to cleanse myself. He can give me priestly fitness for holy service, and make me conscious that He has given it to me, so that I may take up the service of God in purity and liberty. None of us can be assured of priestly fitness save by having to do with Christ. And who that loves Him

would wish to be anything, or to do anything, that was not confirmed by Him? It is surely our way of holiness and joy to have to do with the Priest with Urim and with Thummim.

Then our genealogy is shown amongst the brethren by our walk and ways and spirit and by serving in love. Demetrius was one who had established his genealogy, for he had "witness borne to him by all, and by the truth itself; and *we* also," says John, "bear witness, and thou knowest that our witness is true." Diotrephes could not have shown any divine genealogy. The brethren are all the time taking account of what they see in us. If they see spiritual features in us they know our genealogy. There are some who remain doubtful for a long time; some break bread for years without giving much evidence that they have the Spirit. We should be more concerned to show our genealogy in a practical way. We judge young people more by what we see in them than by what they say. If they find pleasure in being with the saints, and are interested in what they hear in the meetings, and like to read what is spiritually helpful, and are not ashamed to confess Christ, they are showing their genealogy. Reading is a great test both for young and old; what we find pleasure in reading shows what our minds are after.

"And some of the chief fathers, when they came to the house of Jehovah which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in its place. They gave after their ability to the treasure of the work sixty-one thousand darics of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' coats." We must not think that the house of God can be built without some sacrifice on our part. What are we prepared to give that God may have a dwelling and be expressed here? I do not refer to gifts of money, though that may have place in it. What am I able to bring in moral contribution to the house? If I can bring evidence that God, as known in grace and love, has a great place in my heart, and my desire is that

He shall be expressed here, and worshipped here, I am known in heaven as a contributor to the house of God. This means that what is of the flesh has been brought down: the pride and vanity that made self so important have been reduced; God, known as revealed in Christ, has become my joy and boast. I am now to walk worthy of God so that He may be expressed here, and not the wretched features of the flesh.

The chief fathers provided "one hundred priests' coats." Their exercise was that there should be suitability in the priests for the holy service of God. The priests' coats are often lacking. Without the "beauty of holiness" God's priests are not suitably attired, and they discredit any service which they may profess to render. Paul is concerned about the priests' coats when he says, "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in God's fear," 2 Cor. 7: 1. It is most important that those who have returned from Babylon to-day should not be content with an outward position of separation, but that they should be marked by a holiness which is suitable for the service of the house of God.

CHAPTER 3

The "seventh month" speaks of recovery. The passover, the feast of unleavened bread and the feast of weeks stood in relation to the beginning of the year, but the holy convocations of the seventh month were "at the turn of the year." They have typical reference to God's future ways in recovering Israel after long centuries of departure. And they contain instruction for us in this day when God is graciously reviving His precious truth in many hearts. The seventh month began with "a memorial of blowing of trumpets," Lev. 23: 24, speaking of a special sounding forth of testimony for the calling together of

God's people in relation to Himself. And in the scripture before us we read that "the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem," Ezra 3: 1. A sense of their unity as God's people was brought into their hearts, and a sense, also, that Jerusalem was the place where Jehovah had set His name, and where He would be approached and served. Any really helpful testimony amongst the people of God to-day will engage them with what they have in common. They can only approach God in one way. There was but one "altar of the God of Israel," and the first thought of the returned remnant was to build that altar. They desired to set up the offering service "as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God." They thought first of what was due to God according to His original order. In the application of this to ourselves, the coming to Jerusalem signifies that we come to what is universal—to God's great thoughts for all His saints. But we cannot have those wondrous thoughts before us without being concerned that our approach to God should correspond with them. The altar is "the altar of burnt-offering for Israel," 1 Chron. 22: 1.

They were only a small remnant returned from captivity, but the service of God was before them as it had been "written in the law of Moses." Their minds reverted to the beginning of their dispensation, and to that which had divine authority, and in a day of general departure we have to return to what has been spoken by the Lord through our apostles.

It is evident that the altar must be built before there can be offering upon it. And Joshua and Zerubbabel represent the priestly and royal qualities in saints which are essential to the building of the altar. I understand this to speak of the setting up amongst the saints of a definite apprehension of Christ in His ability to sustain all that is sacrificial. What was "written in the law of Moses" showed the necessity for sacrifice, that God's glory might be met, and His people set free to approach Him. But

approach to God by sacrifice requires that Christ shall be known in altar character. The altar presents a very full thought of the kind of humanity seen in Christ which qualified Him to bear all that was before His spirit in Gethsemane, and all that He endured on the cross. He was able to drink the cup which the Father gave Him, to sustain the judgment of God, and to annul the power of death.

The building of the altar, in its application to us, would consist in the truth of Christ as "the holy one of God" being set up in spiritual power in our souls. Apart from this there can be no true offering, no real service of God. So that what John speaks of as "the doctrine of the Christ," 2 John, is of vital importance; he that abides not in it has not God. A divine Person—the eternal I AM come in flesh, and having resurrection power in Himself, could alone be the altar. So that when truth was being recovered, and the service of the house of God was in view, the first essential was a right thought of Christ. Every spiritual element in saints would lead them to put this first. The spiritual leaders of a hundred years ago were marked by an intense jealousy in regard to the perfection of Christ's holy Person, and the blessedness of His relations as Man with God. The enemy sought to attack this, and hence a conflict arose about the middle of the last century the effect of which was to bring into prominence the true doctrine of Christ, and to establish the principle that it was unrighteous and unholy to have fellowship with those who held and taught what was contrary to it. It ought to have been obvious to all that uncompromising separation from error as to Christ was the only divine course, and none should have thought of evading the responsibility of taking this course. I believe the exercise as to Christian fellowship being absolutely exclusive of any unholy thought of Christ answered to the building of the altar in the day of assembly recovery. It was, indeed, an essential matter, for nothing will be right,

or acceptable to God, that has not as its basis a true thought of Christ.

The returned remnant counted on the altar being a protection to them. I think they must have read what Ezekiel had written many years before as to the altar being the "mount of God" and the "lion of God." See notes to Ezekiel 43: 15, 16. "And they set the altar on its base; for fear was upon them because of the people of the countries," v. 3. They felt that to maintain their relations with Jehovah by His altar was the best security against every adverse power. In times of pressure, when there is much that might bring fear upon the people of God, our great concern should be to go on with the service of God. Christ magnified in our hearts as the altar, and presented continually to God in burnt-offering character, will be a defence for us whatever fears or foes assail us.

The offerings referred to here, vv. 2—5, were burnt-offerings; that is, they were offerings for acceptance. "At the entrance of the tent of meeting shall he present it, for his acceptance before Jehovah . . . and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him . . . an offering by fire to Jehovah of a sweet odour," Lev. 1: 3, 4, 9. The burnt-offerings in Ezra 3 typify recovery to a sense of acceptance before God. This has been a striking feature of the work of God in these last days. For many centuries the grace of God was obscured by thoughts which were of men; Paul's gospel was practically unknown; so that even converted persons were kept in darkness and bondage under law, and, as to their own consciousness, still in the flesh. Few knew what it was to be in the liberty of grace, as being permanently before God in the fragrance of Christ as the Burnt-offering. Consequently the public worship retained all—even true believers—on the ground of sinners needing forgiveness and looking to have it through the merits and sin-bearing of Christ. But this left souls on the ground of what they were as in the flesh. There was no thought of an entirely new place and

acceptance before God according to Christ and in the sweet savour of His offering.

The Reformation brought in a measure of divine light, chiefly as to justification by faith, but all can see in the fixed services even of the reformed bodies how little place is given to the thought of acceptance. Sins are confessed, and forgiveness sought, and absolution is pronounced, but no utterances are provided for the worshippers which express the joy of conscious acceptance. Indeed, Paul's doctrine, of what the saints are in Christ Jesus does not enter into the service.

We know from what was "written in the law of Moses" that the burnt-offering might be a bullock, a sheep, or goat, or a fowl, Lev. 1. Of these, that "of the herd and of the flock" was the full, or normal, offering. It was a divine typical presentation of Christ in the vigour of His holy manhood, the altogether perfect and unblemished One, whose inward being could be laid bare, and each separate characteristic of His humanity could be searchingly examined without the discovery of anything that came short of absolute perfection under the eye of God. Each part of what He was inwardly, as well as each movement in His walk, answered perfectly to every requirement and delight of God. The offerer enters into every detail of that holy life which was offered up for him. He sees it all tested by the holy fire of God, and yet, as thus tested, nothing was yielded to God but "sweet odour." And all is seen to be for the acceptance of the offerer. The thought of his sin being covered is not left out of the type, for it is said, "to make atonement for him." It is clearly recognised that the offerer has no acceptance in himself; his offering is accepted for him. He identifies himself with the perfection of his offering, and the sweet odour that has gone up to God is for him, and, indeed, for all saints. It is a blessed reality that God would have every believer to know this in his own spiritual experience. As offering up burnt-offerings we identify ourselves before God with the

perfection of Christ, and with the sweet odour which that perfection has yielded to God when searched by His holy fire. This wondrous thought of acceptance has been made good in the faith of many hearts during the last hundred years. And wherever it has been made good by the Spirit it has given approach to God an entirely different character from what is common in the Christian profession. It corresponds with the burnt-offerings of the returned remnant in Ezra 3. It is a return, by divine grace, to the original thought of God in this present period.

Christ has "delivered himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour," so that we can now present Him to God as the One who is accepted for us. What a shining of divine favour this is! We could not possibly have a better acceptance. He said at a most touching moment, "This is my body which is for you," and that included in its wondrous meaning all that was set forth in the burnt-offering. His entire devotion to God is given for us. As being consciously before God in the value of what Christ has offered we can bring His holy worth to God as that in which we are accepted. This character of approach was well known to the apostles, and to those who learned from them; it glorifies God and magnifies the Lord Jesus Christ and fills the worshippers with profound spiritual joy. But the light and joy of all this are found with those who have returned to Jerusalem, and set up the altar; it will never be known in Babylon. It is a fact that *acceptance* is almost an unknown word in the religious world. But every believing soul should be filled with desire to approach God where the sweet odour of Christ as the Burnt-offering goes up from hearts united in the joy of conscious acceptance in Him. This characterises the worship of the returned remnant to-day.

All this was previous to the house being built, for we read, "But the foundation of the temple of Jehovah was not yet laid," v. 6. Saints may be happy in conscious acceptance, and yet need the truth of the assembly as the

house and temple of God to be built up in their souls to qualify them to take their place in it intelligently. But if we have a true thought of Christ as the Altar, and the consciousness of acceptance in the sweet odour of His delivering Himself up for us, we have liberty Godward, and we are free to receive instruction, and to take up exercise, as to assembly order and service. The material is there which can be built up.

The building of the house in Ezra is typical of what is accomplished by the responsible service of those who labour in the work of God. It is not the assembly viewed as built by Christ, but as the result of spiritual labour on the part of His servants. It lays stress on what may be accomplished by the service of those who have returned from captivity. The building may be furthered by diligence, or it may be hindered by selfish ease, or carried through to completion through the stimulus of the prophetic word. It rests with us to secure the material and to carry on the building; if we are not diligent in this matter the house will not be built. When I say 'we,' I include all who are responsible to be builders, and no Christian can decline responsibility in this matter. Paul says, "According to the grace of God which has been given to me, as a wise architect, I have laid the foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each see how he builds upon it," 1 Cor. 3: 10. The saints are "God's building," but He uses the labour of His servants to bring to pass what is in His mind. The building of God's house, as seen in Ezra, is brought about by spiritual labour in a day of recovery. It typifies the building which is going on to-day. No labour can be too great to secure the divine thoughts. The work of the Lord to-day includes service in the gospel, for its object is to secure material for the house, and it includes feeding babes in Christ that they may grow up to spiritual manhood, and it includes bringing saints into separation from unrighteousness and leading them to call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. All this enters into

responsible service, though we know well that it will only be effected by the grace and work of God. The house of God can be built with such material as that. It is the "cedar-trees from Lebanon"; it comes from a morally elevated region.

It is the first concern of all true builders to have suitable material, for the house of God cannot be built of natural material. Jesus Christ must be in the soul, or there is nothing to build on, but the builder must take heed that what he adds will correspond with that foundation. It is only as saints are available that any building can be done, for it is through their being built up and built together by spiritual ministry that the house where God is served according to His pleasure comes into being as a spiritual reality. It is only such as are consciously "in Christ" that are suitable material for that house, but even when the material is secured much spiritual labour is needed to complete the house, and to furnish its service according to God's mind. The thought of a spiritual house where God dwells, and where He is served according to His pleasure, has to be built up in souls.

Those who had come out of the captivity "appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to superintend," or 'set forward' as in the note, "the work of the house of Jehovah," v. 8. The workmen also were superintended, v. 9. The whole thing was under priestly and spiritual direction, and carried out levitically. In such a matter human and natural thoughts could have no place; the house was "the house of God," and therefore everything must be as He would have it. This is the great exercise for us to-day; that there shall be no innovations, or expedients, nothing that is of the devising, or the inadvertence of the human mind, but that God shall have a house which answers to His mind, and where He is served in a way that gives Him pleasure.

Our chapter does not carry us beyond the foundation of the temple of Jehovah being laid. A beginning was made,

with the true thought in view. This may not appear to be much outwardly, but to make a beginning according to God is very great spiritually, for it is the evidence that God is with His people, and that His word and His Spirit are with them; Hag. 2: 4, 5. However small it is, it is infinitely better than to be going on with formalities, or even earnest services, which are according to men's thoughts of how God should be served. Indeed, it is most interesting to see that laying the foundation of the house gave occasion for most blessed features of the divine service to appear, "according to the directions of David king of Israel," v. 10. Those directions gave the full thought of God as to His service, so far as it is developed in the Old Testament, and when the foundation of the house was laid in a day of recovery the builders had nothing less than this before them. They did not wait until the house was completed. As soon as they *began* to labour for the house and service of God, they had the full thought in view, and He granted them a holy and happy experience of it.

"And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of Jehovah, they set the priests in their apparel, with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise Jehovah according to the directions of David king of Israel. And they sang alternately together in praising and giving thanks to Jehovah. For he is good, for his loving-kindness endureth for ever toward Israel," vv. 10, 11. There is precious instruction for us, and great encouragement, in this. For it shows that when we move practically in the direction of securing a place for the service of God, the Spirit of God at once leads us to think of Christ in relation to that service. He comes before us as the true David, the One under whose hand the whole service of song is ordered. We read in 1 Chronicles 25: 2 of "the sons of Asaph under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied at the direction of the king," and in verse 6 it is said that "All these were under the direction of their fathers Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman, for song in the

house of Jehovah, with cymbals, lutes and harps, for the service of the house of God, under the direction of the king." This corresponds with the last clause of Ezra 3: 10 which reads "according to the directions of David king of Israel." It suggests that they were near to David, under his direction, literally 'at his hand,' and thus available for the holy service. It is our privilege to stand thus in relation to Christ as Head—not, in this connection, under His authority as Lord, but at His hand so as to be with Him in the service of praise Godward.

David was "the sweet psalmist of Israel"; he struck the key note for all the praises of Israel; every pious Israelite would feel that what David voiced in praise was suitable for him to sing. Now the Spirit of God would lead us to give Christ that place, for His own utterance by the prophetic Spirit was, "in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee," Ps. 22: 22. It is wonderful that He should take such a place, as having glorified God in bearing the judgment due to sin, and being able to declare God's name to His brethren. He voices the praise that is suitable in God's house, and *His* praise is the true and full measure of what is proper there. Anything out of harmony with His praise is unsuitable for the assembly in the midst of which He sings. Only those who are *at His hand* can sing suitably now.

"The priests in their apparel" represent the saints as set before God in the value of what Christ has accomplished, standing consciously in His worth and favour, and exercised to worship in the beauty of holiness. This is essential to any true service in the house of God, and the "trumpets" which the priests have would indicate that the service may be furthered by spiritual ministry. The precious thoughts of God being brought freshly to us may have a most stimulating effect on the service. And the levites with cymbals indicate a ready response to what is ministered. It could not be the divine thought that any spiritual ministry in the assembly should fall

flat, without calling forth a glad response. The saints, as spiritually formed, answer to every divine thought that is presented to them. There is a counterpart in their affections to what sounds forth from the trumpets. How delightful it is when some precious thought of God is set before the saints, and it finds a ready response in suitable praise and worship! "And they sang alternately together in praising and giving thanks to Jehovah." This is imitated in the formal services of Christendom, but it is only found in reality where suitable conditions obtain, and the headship of Christ is known. Heart answering to heart, and voice to voice, so that what is expressed by one is answered to, and added to, by another! So that, without any formally ordered service, there is delightful order and harmony in the service of praise. And all blends to celebrate what God is in His goodness and loving-kindness, and in the whole counsel of His love with regard to those whom He has blessed in Christ.

In our day where there has been a true desire to serve God according to His pleasure in His assembly He has given His saints much enlargement of heart in His great thoughts of love, and notes of praise have been sounded such as were not heard during long centuries of the church's history. Something of the true character of assembly service and worship has come into evidence, even though in limited and feeble conditions. There is opportunity now to praise the Lord according to the excellencies in which He would have the assembly to know Him. And we may be sure that it is a very great joy to Him still to find a few hearts in the midst of whom He can sing praise to God. And saints can still, as the brethren of Christ, know that His Father is our Father, and His God our God. They can unitedly cry, Abba, Father, in conscious worship. Where such precious realities are known and enjoyed there is a revival of true assembly service, and it is a marvellous contrast to what is known in the Christian profession generally. It is well

to recognise that the Spirit of God in Ezra had in mind the very conditions and spiritual privileges that are present now even in a day of much outward weakness.

"And all the people shouted with a great shout to the praise of Jehovah, because the foundation of the house of Jehovah was laid." This was the true note for the occasion, for it was a day of revival and of divine favour. The weeping with a loud voice on the part of the ancient men that had seen the first house, v. 12, was not in the current of the mind of God at that moment any more than the weeping in Nehemiah 8: 9. There was, indeed, much to make them conscious of weakness in themselves, and outwardly it was a "day of small things." But, notwithstanding this, a beginning had been made of something for God, and the service of praise was going on according to David's direction. It was not a time, according to faith, for weeping, but for praising God. The weepers may not have intended to discourage the builders, but their weeping was the result of their feeling that the work then going on was "as nothing." God, addressing these very people, said, "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?" Hag. 2: 3. They could not see the spiritual greatness of what was going on; they could only see a "day of small things" and they despised it. They were not occupied with the loving-kindness which the singers were celebrating. They seemed to have pious regard for the past, and commendable feelings, but the result of their weeping was that a mixed impression was conveyed, in which nothing could be clearly discerned. This is always a mark of Satan's work, even when true saints become instrumental in furthering it. In this case an element was introduced which formed no part of the service as instituted "according to the directions of David king of Israel." And it tended to discourage the builders by making it appear that what they were doing was "as nothing." This is just what Satan would have had them

to think. It was a most effective way of weakening their hands. It was the first manifestation of unbelief in the returned remnant.

God met this discouraging influence by a thrice-repeated call to "be strong." "But now be strong, Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith Jehovah, and work: for I am with you, saith Jehovah of hosts. The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you: fear ye not . . . I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts . . . The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts," Hag. 2: 4—9. God cheered the builders of that day with the thought of the house being finished and filled with glory, and that "the latter glory" of the house should be greater than the former. He would have His people to work in view of His thought as to the house being brought to completion. This is what God would have before us. He would have us to regard the building of His house as a progressive matter going on to completion. He spoke to the returned remnant through Zechariah of the headstone being brought forth "with shoutings: Grace, grace unto it!" The headstone is the completion of the building. He said, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; and his hands shall finish it," Zech. 4: 7—9. This, of course, has reference to Christ, but it suggests in principle, that every one who begins to build in connection with God's house is to have in view the completion of what he has begun. Whenever there is a beginning made to secure what is for the glory and pleasure of God it brings before Him the thought of it being brought to completion. As we think of this we are encouraged to go on with the building. It is a progressive work all the time; there is always something being added. We look for this every week; something added that is of God, and of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. As this proceeds, we move

on constructively; we do not look back with regret; we look forward to continual increase. This is how spiritual energy is stimulated.

Scriptures in the New Testament present this very clearly: "in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord," Eph 2: 21. The complete temple is in view, and the thought of increase leading up to that great result. "Yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," 1 Pet. 2: 5. The building is not looked at either by Paul or Peter as completed, but the work is going on with a view to completion according to what God has in mind. He would have this to be ever before us as a present stimulus. He encouraged and strengthened His builders in Haggai's day by setting before them the thought of His house being filled with glory, and He would have nothing less before us now. It may be that there is, as yet, only a small beginning. But the thought has been revived in many hearts of the assembly as God's temple and house, where His mind is known and answered to. Now we are to labour incessantly that the full thought of God shall be reached in grace and in spiritual power. He would have the assembly as His house to be filled with glory. That is, with moral and spiritual glory, so that, as it was said, "in his temple doth every one" (or, everything) "say, Glory," Ps. 29: 9. We realise that much work remains to be done if such a result as that is to be brought about, but if we have anything less than this in view we are not really working with God.

If we only look at things externally we shall be like the "ancient men." The present great spiritual revival will be "as nothing" in our eyes. But if we think of what is of God, and for God's pleasure, as being the only thing that has true glory, we shall find that spiritual building is going on to-day. The precious thoughts of God are being set up in the faith and affections of saints, and as those

thoughts take form in our souls by divine grace we shall see more and more the incoming of that glory with which God intends to fill His house. If we have a true thought of 'glory' we shall not fail to discern it when it is present. Christ being magnified as the altar and as the burnt-offering is 'glory'; God getting an increasing place in the hearts of His saints is 'glory'; saints being "under the direction of" Christ for the service of praise Godward is 'glory'. God intends that His house shall be filled with glory. For those who really have God's house before them the glory is coming in all the time. Spiritually it is a day of great things.

CHAPTERS 4 & 5

If God opens a great door, and an effectual one, there are sure to be many adversaries, and we see something of their activities in Ezra 4. They came with good words and fair speeches. "We would build with you; for we seek your God, as ye; and we have sacrificed to him since the days of Esar-haddon, king of Assyria, who brought us up hither," v. 2. Spiritual judgment would find such people out, as it was said to the angel of the assembly in Ephesus, "thou hast tried them who say that themselves are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars," Rev. 2: 2. This was at a time when the true apostles had not all gone. Paul also speaks of some at Corinth as "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ," 2 Cor. 11: 13. What took place at the beginning of the church's history has appeared in the day of revival at the end.

It is a matter of common knowledge that when the Lord revived a spiritual ministry of the truth as to the assembly a counter-revival at once began in which much was made of the 'church' and of antiquity, apostolic succession and sacraments. It was Satan's attempt to nullify what God was doing by setting up again the things by which he had corrupted the Christian profession in its early history. All

this has to be judged and refused as the work of adversaries. Only true saints know how to build the house of God, or how to serve in it when it is built. "The people of the land" can imitate in a fleshly way what is of God, but they can never bring one living stone into its place in the spiritual house. Their help is to be absolutely refused. "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house to our God, but we alone will build to Jehovah the God of Israel, as king Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us," v. 3. We have ever to watch against the natural and the fleshly coming in to contribute something to the work of God. Such an intrusion will certainly spoil the building; it is wood, hay, stubble, which will all be burned when the fire tries it.

When the help of "the people of the land" was refused they came out in their true colours, and "weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building; and they hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia," vv. 4, 5. "The people of the land" have a form of piety, but they represent those who wish to maintain things as they are in the Christian profession, and are therefore adverse to any ministry which would build up what is distinctively of God. How many 'counsellors' have been hired to write books and pamphlets in opposition to what has been brought out from Scripture during the last century! I suppose that every part of the truth which has been brought out by the Spirit of God has been attacked as error, and has had to make its way in face of constant opposition. Many hands have been weakened by these efforts of the adversaries; many have been troubled in building.

But this is only a proof of spiritual decline on the part of the builders, and shows that a love of selfish ease makes them think more of their own comfort than of the house of God.

(In the original printing of this book the outline of Haggai was incorporated at this point. It is thought unnecessary to duplicate this outline,—see separate volume.)

CHAPTER 6

The effect of the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah was that Zerubbabel and Jeshua rose up and began to build the house of God, "and with them were the prophets of God, who helped them." They did not wait for the sanction of Darius; they went on with the work as an obligation to which they were called by God, so that even onlookers could see that something was being done. It was reported to Darius the king that "the house of the great God" was "being built with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work is being carried on with diligence, and prospers in their hand," Ezra 5: 8. There is a fairness in this report which does not appear in the letter written to Artaxerxes some years before. When faith moved in relation to the building of the house, God moved providentially to secure favourable conditions for His servants, and He also brought out His mind more fully, and in greater detail, as to the house and its service. The matter being referred to Darius brought to light the original decree of Cyrus when Jehovah charged him to build the house. This was the word of God for the time, for the commandment of the God of Israel and the commandment of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes are identified in chapter 6: 14. No doubt it has been written for our instruction that we may have definitely before us certain things which are to characterise the house of God in a day of recovery like the present.

"Let the house be built for a place where they offer sacrifices," v. 3. It is well for the youngest believer to know that he is called to be built up along with his brethren as "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," 1 Pet. 2: 5. The apostle Peter would have even "newborn babes" to think of this. Does it not appeal to our hearts when we are assured that we can offer something to God,

and that He will be pleased with it? We are part of the holy priesthood; we are not merely spectators of what others offer; each of us is privileged to have part in the offering service.

But this requires that "foundations be solidly laid," v. 3; which means that Christ alone is to be before us as the One chosen of God and precious. If there were any admixture of self along with Christ nothing could really be *solid*. But "he that believes on him shall not be put to shame. To you therefore who believe is the preciousness." All the preciousness of Christ is for us as the basis of all our relations with God in His house. We are there according to the value and adornment of the chief Corner-stone. The thought of the foundation and the chief Corner-stone are brought together in 1 Peter 2: 6, 7. He blends Isaiah 28: 16 and Psalm 118: 22. The solidity of what we rest upon is combined with the preciousness and attractiveness to God which are found in Christ. "For other foundation can no man lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. 3: 11. Paul had laid this foundation in his ministry at Corinth, and any solid building must be on that foundation. Whatever is built upon it must correspond with it or be found worthless. For responsible service in building is before us in the scripture which we are considering; it is what is done by means of the ministry of the word. The first essential for service in building is to be impressed by the fact that Jesus, God's anointed Man, is the foundation. There is to be no thought of building anything on man after the order of Adam; there must be the introduction of Jesus Christ as a foundational matter in the souls of saints. Paul's ministry left no uncertainty as to this.

Then God would impress us with the greatness of His house. "Its height sixty cubits, its breadth sixty cubits." It is noticeable that this is twice the height of Solomon's temple, and three times its breadth. The enlarged dimensions given in the decree of Cyrus suggest that in a day

of recovery the Spirit of God will bring out in a special way the greatness of what is in the mind of God. The more it has been departed from, the greater the necessity for magnifying it. As one has said, nothing but the brightest light will do for the darkest day. The "height" speaks of the spirituality which marks the house, the elevated and heavenly character of what is known there, matters far above the level of this world and of the thoughts of men. The "breadth" indicates that every part of the truth must have its place; there must be no picking out of what suits a narrow position; and all the sectarianism must necessarily be narrower than the mind of God. The whole company of saints on earth must be taken account of if we wish to have a right estimate of the greatness of God's house, but they must be viewed from the standpoint of what they are by the calling and work of God, and not according to what they have become through departing from the truth.

"Three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber" give, in a symbolical way, the materials of which the house is built. "Stones" have reference, I believe, to what the saints are by the calling of God. There is fixity and permanence about this, for it is wholly of God, and nothing can invalidate it. The truth of what saints are by divine calling is to be fully maintained in ministry so that God's called ones may learn to regard themselves and their brethren in that light. When the Lord said to Simon, "*thou* shalt be called Cephas (which interpreted is stone)," John 1: 42, He gave Simon permanently his place as called to be part of the divine building. It is given to us to love and pray for "all the saints," but in doing so we think of them as subjects of divine calling. One of the evils of Christendom is that certain persons are deemed to be worthy to be spoken of as 'saints' whereas the truth is that the whole company of God's elect are saints by divine calling, see Rom. 1: 7; 1 Cor. 1: 2, and this is as addressed in responsibility here, so that now we are all to

act "worthily of saints." If we give up our calling as saints—and it is to be feared that many have done so—we shall give up the character of walk that is worthy of saints, and this is just what Satan would wish us to do.

The calling wherewith we have been called includes the truth of "being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom *ye* also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit," Eph. 2: 20—22. This links directly with what we are considering in Ezra. It is not a voluntary or optional matter; it is a calling of which we are to walk worthily. Spiritual building goes on as we seek to enter into the understanding of this, so that we walk with our fellow-saints in the truth of it. God would have all His saints formed in the truth of it, so that they might be fitted to take their places as constituent parts of His house. It is well to ponder all that lies in the region of divine calling. As we spiritually apprehend the great realities into which we are brought by divine calling we shall be far removed in our spirits and in our walk from those very limited and human associations which hold many true saints in spiritual bondage. We shall become "great stones" in God's spiritual house.

Then "a row of new timber" suggests what the saints are morally by God's work of grace in them. We know from chapter 3: 7 that the timber was "cedar-trees from Lebanon." Each tree had its own history and growth, and had to undergo many operations and processes before it came into the condition when it could be placed as "new timber" in the house of God. There is a work of grace, beginning with new birth—which would, perhaps, answer to the planting of the tree—and followed by God giving increase until mature growth is secured. Paul could say, "by the grace of God I am what I am," and we can well understand that every moral feature which made up what

Paul was by grace was 'new'. How different it was from everything that marked Saul the persecutor of saints! The "new timber" is what saints have become morally as "under grace," and as taught by grace. It has come to pass that they have taken on, as the result of moral exercises under the reign of grace, a 'new' character which is suitable to adorn the house of God. So if the 'stones' refer to what God's elect are according to calling and purpose, the "new timber" typifies what they become morally under the sway and teaching of grace. The purpose line and the moral line combine to furnish building material for the house. Of course both are the work of God, but viewed from different standpoints.

"And let the expenses be given out of the king's house." Nothing in this work of building is at our own charges. As faith and love take on the work it will be found that what is needed is supplied without fail. The golden and silver vessels are restored also. We should look for this, that suitable vessels for holy service should be furnished. The house is not complete without "vessels to honour" being there. To know the truth of the house is not sufficient; we may know much, in a certain way, without being suitable vessels for holy service. But such vessels are essential to the service. So we must pray that they may become available. I have no doubt the gold and silver vessels are in being; they are there potentially, though they may not yet be found actually in the house and in service in a practical sense. It is well that they should know that they are claimed for holy service in the house. Many of them are, alas! still in Babylon, but they cannot render there the service to which they are appointed. Being a "vessel to honour" is conditional upon separating vessels of dishonour; 2 Tim. 2: 21.

Then all the requirements for sacrificial and offering service were to be given "day by day without fail." In the service of God's house the materials for offering are all divinely furnished. In a certain sense they are furnished

in the Scriptures, for the preciousness of Christ Godward is unfolded there to be sought out and known by those who take pleasure in it. Perhaps one of the most wonderful things in the providential ordering of God has been the invention of printing, which has made it possible for every person, in this country at least, to have "the oracles of God." I believe God had in mind in this, not only that men should be saved, but that they should come to the knowledge of the truth connected with His house and service. Men need not be misled; they need not be unfurnished. Then God has also given in these days a spiritual ministry of the truth, which as received into the affections of His people has furnished them with material for offering. If persons are interested immense supplies are available. All that pertains to the service of the house is being supplied "of the king's goods" to-day. It is being presented in ministry, and is there for the holy priesthood to take up in spiritual grace and power so as to use it in offering service Godward in His house.

The work was brought to completion, and the house finished, in the sixth year of Darius. I think we have seen what corresponds with this in our own times. No one who has been intelligently observant of God's ways in recovering the truth can doubt that the house of God and its service has been very largely brought before the minds and hearts of saints for many years past. The great principles of the house and its service have been brought out in spiritual ministry over against all the departure and corruptions that characterise the religious world. And there have been those who, humbly and prayerfully, have sought to take up what has been ministered, and who have desired to have the joy of serving God in His house according to the truth of what He has set up. The truth itself is found amongst the saints now in something like spiritual completeness. There is, perhaps, a good deal to be added yet to fill out the great thought of God, and to "beautify" the house, as we read in the next chapter, but

as to the great outstanding features of the house they are present to the faith and love of many hearts in something like completeness. This is not anything to the credit of men; it is purely of God's sovereign mercy, and is to be thankfully acknowledged as such.

The house was not only "built and completed," but it was dedicated "with joy," vv. 16—18. The service of offering, which had been long discontinued, was resumed; burnt-offerings were numerous, "and for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." It is beautiful to see the blending of exercises which are set forth here in type in connection with the dedication of the house. There is approach to God with joy in the acceptance of Christ, and at the same time a link preserved with all the people of God. It has been, and continues to be, a time of great departure, so that the glory of God can only be connected with His people generally on the ground of the sin-offering. Thousands of believers do not realise that their position and their associations, and even the character of their worship, are so contrary to the will of God, that, as measured by divine holiness, they require a sin-offering. But infinite grace has placed "all Israel" on the ground of the sin-offering, so that God does not bring in judgment on many things which displease Him. He goes on in forbearance because Christ has glorified Him in bearing the judgment due to what He disapproves. We do not forget the departure, but we hold all saints in our affections as identified with the value of the sin-offering. The whole purpose of God in regard to them will be carried out eventually on that ground. The service of God can only go on in its full scope as we take all saints into account as being in the mind of God for blessing in Christ. So that all true "spiritual sacrifices" have, in the mind of the offerers, some relation to all God's elect as blessed in Christ. The whole scope of grace and of divine purpose enters into the matter, and God is glorified in the vast range of His actings in love.

On this ground priestly and levitical service is carried on.

"And the children of the captivity held the passover upon the fourteenth of the first month," v. 19. The passover was held now in entirely new conditions, for it was as "the children of the captivity" that they held it. The whole history of departure and recovering mercy gave a touch to this passover which it had never had before. The house had been built and dedicated in a remnant time and in infinite mercy. No passover before had ever been quite like it. We cannot be intelligent as to God's present ways if we do not realise that assembly privileges and service are taken up now in the light of return from captivity and recovery in mercy. Things cannot be taken up now as if the church was in its original state. We must, like the men of Issachar, have "understanding of the times." It might be said that believers broke bread and enjoyed assembly privileges at the beginning, and we can do the same now. But we need to bear in mind that God has called us at a particular time in assembly history. We have to take things up now as having come out of captivity; we take them up on the ground of what God has restored in sovereign mercy.

We cannot ignore the fact that there has been great departure, and that the principles of the world have corrupted the church, but God has brought a remnant back, and given a precious ministry of His own thoughts as to the assembly and its service. We are not simply going on with the original order, but we take up things now in the light of the great recovery which God has granted. So that a special kind of purity and unity is called for. "The priests and the Levites had purified themselves as one man: they were all pure," v. 20. The compassions of God which have granted such wondrous recovery become a mighty influence in the direction of purity and unity. No assembly privileges can be rightly taken up to-day save as in the sense of God's special movements in the last days. It is not now simply what God did at Pentecost and

in apostolic days, but what He is doing to-day after eighteen centuries of church failure. The children of the captivity had a sense of the immediateness of God's actings for them, and of His present support. It was not that they had got back to Solomon's temple, but they were in the presence of God's wondrous actings in their own day. It is not uncommon to find people taken up with what they speak of as 'pentecostal,' speaking with tongues and the like, who are profoundly ignorant of what God is doing to-day. But when God's present movements of recovery are discerned, they lead to purity and unity, and assembly privileges can then be taken up in view of the house of God being the assembly of the living God. That is, it is God as in movement to-day that is before us, as we get it here, "And the children of Israel that were come back out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves to them from the filthiness of the nations of the land, to seek Jehovah the God of Israel, did eat," v. 21.

It was Jehovah as known in recovery, and as having a house in remnant times amongst the children of the captivity, that they sought. And they found Him, for "they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy; for Jehovah had made them joyful," v. 22. They had experience that God was with them in the work of His house, and they were pure and separate, as a people must be who have to do with the living God. The feast of unleavened bread required the purging out of all leaven; not a grain of anything left that would inflate, or give importance to, the flesh. Then we can be truly 'joyful' for God is before us in His wondrous actings of recovery, and we are true to the unleavened character of His assembly. The truth of the house of God as restored to a faithful remnant must work out in this way. It leads to the spiritual privileges of the assembly being taken up in purity and unity and spiritual joy. For the death of Christ is preserved in our view continually from week to week in His supper, and we must, in consistency with that death, disavow all that is of the flesh.

CHAPTERS 7 & 8

The going up of Ezra was greatly to the advantage of the returned remnant, for he was a "teaching priest," and "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which Jehovah the God of Israel had given," v. 6. He had "directed his heart to seek the law of Jehovah and to do it, and to teach in Israel the statutes and the ordinances," v. 10. He had priestly intelligence as to what was required "to beautify the house of Jehovah," v. 27. His service was not to build, but to beautify, and he made request to the king as having this in mind, "according to the hand of Jehovah his God upon him." He came up invested with authority, and furnished with silver and gold, and, in addition to what he brought with him, he had unlimited permission to draw on "the king's treasure house" for "whatever more shall be needful." Provision was made for everything requisite for the beautifying and maintenance of the house and its service. All this was in the will of God, as following upon the building of the house and its dedication. The service of Ezra was needed as well as that of Joshua and Zerubbabel. And it has been so in our day.

Ezra represents a ministry which brings out from Scripture increased light as to the service of God, a ministry which has in view that the house shall be spiritually beautified. This requires attention to detail. Priestly sensibilities will lead to particular attention being given to "the law," which, for us, includes the whole of Scripture. Ezra was "an accomplished scribe of the law of the God of the heavens," v. 12; he had an accurate acquaintance with the law, and would be able to bring the law to bear on every detail of the service. "The law," for us, includes all that God has made known as His will. An "accomplished scribe" can bring it out, and call attention to features which will beautify the house. When saints first began to

break bread apart from any sectarian position, there was much yet to learn as to the assembly as the house of God, and its holy service. But saints in separation from human systems were in a position where they could learn, and as they were prepared to receive light it was given to them. Wherever there is faithfulness to light that has been given, God vouchsafes further light as to His will. The last century has witnessed a continual accession of spiritual light. Attention has been called to one thing after another which needed adjustment. God has not failed to provide a ministry which has brought out His mind with increasing clearness and fulness. He has given much help as to details connected with His service, and He will no doubt continue to do so. All the positive ministry which makes God better known, and which exalts His beloved Son, and which brings out the thoughts of divine love in regard to His saints, has brought with it increased precious material for holy service. Much spiritual wealth, answering to the silver and gold brought up by Ezra, has been brought up to enrich the service.

No thoughtful person can consider what has been furnished in ministry, even in our own time, without being impressed by the fact that it has tended to 'beautify' the house of God, and to enhance His service. Even conflicts which have arisen, and difficulties which have had to be met, have been the means of bringing out further light and giving increased knowledge of God, and this beautifies the house and helps its service. Sorrowful as conflicts are—and particularly when they result in saints missing their way—they are enriching when we see that something that is precious to God is at stake. This must be the case if there is any spiritual element at all in a conflict. It is in looking out for spiritual gain, and for what makes more of divine Persons, that we shall find safety and enlargement. Who can measure the gain that has come to saints through light being given as to eternal life and the Lord's sonship in manhood? Yet these great realities were

not established in the faith and affections of saints without conflict. Enrichment lies in the positive ministry which God gives, and this is the thing to look out for. We must, in principle, keep near to Ezra and his companions; we must hold to that ministry which brings out the mind of God, and which adds to the beauty of His house and the richness of its service.

It is touching to see God putting an earnest care for His house and its service into the hearts of many at a time when even those whom He had delivered from captivity had proved unfaithful, as we learn from chapter 9. The great provision of silver and gold and vessels which Ezra brought to Jerusalem was certainly not because the remnant at Jerusalem was in a good condition. It was far otherwise. The whole matter was the fruit of God's mercy and grace; it was a fresh movement of revival at a time when sad defection had taken place at Jerusalem. If God did not renew His work of revival from time to time it would most certainly die down, and He generally revives His work by bringing in some spiritual element that was not there before. I have no doubt that in the corrective epistles to Galatia and Corinth, and the protective epistle to Colosse, much was brought in that was in addition to what the saints had known before. And in the recovery of the truth it has not all been brought out at once. In the days we are speaking of, when God recovered His people, or a remnant of them, from Babylonish captivity, it was first Zerubbabel, then Ezra, then Nehemiah. Each one brought in something that was not there before. We may confidently expect that God will continue His reviving work in these last days until the moment comes for the saints to be translated. It is for us to seek divine strengthening such as Ezra got: "And I was strengthened, as the hand of Jehovah my God was upon me; and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me," chap. 7: 28.

God does not work merely by truth or principles, but by

persons in whom the truth abides. So we find a goodly number of persons in chapter 8 who were prepared to move with Ezra. We are thankful for all ministry of the truth, but truth is very ineffective unless persons move with it in a practical way. Ezra surveyed the company gathered together, chap 8: 15, "and found none of the sons of Levi there." It is sad to think that, when God is moving so graciously to revive His work, there should be a lack of levites. I think it touches a weak spot even to-day. Ezra expects the "chief men" and the "men of understanding" to move in the matter. There must be "ministers for the house of our God," v. 17. It was a matter for exercise and movement. When the Lord said, "the workmen are few," He told His disciples to "supplicate therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth workmen unto his harvest." I suppose we are all conscious of the fewness of the labourers. Let us pray that "by the good hand of our God upon us," v. 18, more may be furnished. Nethinim are also needed as well as levites. They have a subordinate, but very necessary, place as helping the levitical service. It is a comfort to know that there is room for service that is, perhaps, not so highly thought of as the public ministry of the word, but which helps that ministry in a somewhat lower grade of service. Not one who engages in such service is overlooked: "all of them were expressed by name." If we cannot exactly take the place of being levites, let us by all means be Nethinim, and help the levites!

The exercise about "a right way" in verses 21—23 is very touching. The fact that God's good hand had been upon Ezra in a remarkable way did not diminish his exercise as to the path before him. "And I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance." This is a beautiful spirit in which to be found in regard of all the circumstances which beset God's testimony to-day. Ezra had

spoken so confidently to the king about the hand of God being upon all them for good that seek Him that he was ashamed to ask for a band of soldiers. Do we not know something of such an exercise as this? We say things, perhaps really in faith, but when we come to face the actual difficulties and dangers that confront us we find the necessity of being cast upon God in fasting and prayer that our confidence may not be found to be a vain thing. Our faith is not in vain, but we are tested as to its reality. God will never fail a humble and exercised heart. "And we fasted, and besought our God for this; and he was entreated of us."

The silver and the gold and the vessels were put into the care of priests. Only holy persons could be entrusted with holy things, v. 28. All was weighed into their hands at the beginning of the journey, and weighed again at the end in the house of God: "the whole by number and by weight; and all the weight was written down at that time," v. 34. Faithful servants of God are very much concerned that not one item of what is precious as contributing to the service should be lost, or suffer in weight, in our hands. It is to be feared that things often *do* lose weight; we retain things in form and word when their true spiritual *weight* is no longer held in our souls. May God preserve in our hearts true priestly exercise as to this!

The closing verses of chapter 8 are a beautiful example of offering service in remnant times. Both burnt-offerings and sin-offerings are for all Israel. In bringing the preciousness of Christ before God we have the joy of knowing that it is in His mind for all saints. The worship of the assembly is always in the light of what Christ is for acceptance and propitiation for all who are of the assembly. There is great spiritual expansion in this.

CHAPTER 9

The whole history of Scripture prepares us to recognise that, on the human side, there is always a tendency to slip away from what is of God, and the greater the divine favour shown the more subtly will Satan seek to corrupt the people of God in relation to it. So we see here that, after the house had been built, and provision made for its beautifying and the carrying on of its service, unfaithfulness of a serious character manifested itself amongst the returned remnant. The "princes" had to report to Ezra that, "The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations . . . for they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, and have mingled the holy seed with the peoples of the lands; and the hand of the princes and rulers has been chief in this unfaithfulness," vv. 1, 2.

The "princes" were those who, like the house of Chlöe at Corinth, discerned the unfaithfulness that had come in. One would gather that the prophetic ministry of Haggai and Zechariah had ceased at this time, so that no powerful voice from God had been raised to check the mixture of "the holy seed with the peoples of the lands." It is of deep interest to see that in the divine ordering of the assembly provision was made for ministry in each locality of a prophetic character, see 1 Cor. 14. This would assure that, along with what was for positive building up, there would be the calling attention, on God's part, to any influence which might tend to corrupt His temple. Those who prophesied would discern the incoming evil, and would bring in the good to counteract it, long before it showed itself in any glaring way. At Corinth the more showy speaking with tongues had evidently overshadowed the exercise of prophetic gift, and a moral state had developed which would have been checked in its

beginnings if prophecy had had its due place in the assembly. One can understand that it was not a mere detail when Satan succeeded, in the very early days of the church, in setting up the clerical system so that meetings for the exercise of prophetic gift as contemplated in 1 Corinthians 14 became impossible.

There can be no doubt that corrupting influences will always be at work. Salvation lies, in the first place, in the ability to discern that they are at work. This was found with the "princes" when Ezra came to Jerusalem. So long as this element is present there is hope. For if it is pointed out that an evil is present, not only will priestly sensibilities become active, as they did in Ezra, but all who tremble at the words of God will be powerfully affected. Then, if full confession is made, the enemy's work may be so counteracted that complete restoration may be brought about. Indeed, it is a comfort to see that, notwithstanding the unfaithfulness that had to be mourned over and confessed, there is evidence of a much deeper work of God in the souls of His people in the last two chapters of this book than had been seen in the earlier chapters. The lesson of all this is most important for ourselves, for we often have sorrowful reminders that, in spite of much divine favour, the same kind of unfaithfulness shows itself amongst the returned remnant to-day. How often do we see links with the world formed, or links with believers not walking in the truth, either by marriage or friendship, or by association for mutual advantage, sometimes even by joining in worldly pleasures, or by the reading of worldly literature! If these things go on, "the holy seed" does not preserve its own distinctiveness and separation, and the consequences are spiritually disastrous. For these things being carried on are the clear evidence of unfaithfulness to the Lord.

It is to be noticed that the "foreign wives" with which the holy seed had mingled were of the very nations that had to be overcome in Joshua's day. After long centuries

they were still present to exercise a baneful influence on the returned remnant. The very things by which the church was corrupted in its early days are the things which will be a snare to the remnant in our day. They are all "of the world," though presenting themselves in varied forms. "Foreign wives" taken by the people of God represent, for us, not only those personal alliances to which we have referred, but also principles or associations which are contrary to what should mark "the holy seed." For example, the legal principle, which Paul had to combat in the assemblies of Galatia, is one of the "foreign wives" which may be taken to-day. It is a principle which, over the greater part of Christendom, has displaced the true knowledge of God. The world often ensnares by taking on a religious form suited to man after the flesh. But worldly religion always gives some place to the man that was crucified with Christ; it sets up again what God has condemned. And it always takes away from the enjoyment of the blessings of grace, liberty in Christ Jesus, sonship, and the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. The loss of spiritual joy is a danger signal which should warn believers from continuing on the line of religious flesh. Paul said to the Galatians, "What then was your blessedness?" They had turned to law, to circumcision, to observing days and months and times and years, but they had lost their blessedness, they had fallen from grace; they had really gone away from all that they once enjoyed in Christ.

Satan does not always use religious or legal flesh to turn us aside. Perhaps more often in our day he allures by something that appeals to our natural and carnal tendencies. What a terrible thing it is for one who has known something of the privileges of the assembly to give them up for some bit of fleshly gratification! It was by such means that he brought about unfaithfulness at Corinth in the early days, and he will use the same things now. Paul brought the truth of the temple before the Corinthians to

correct their unholiness, and their association with the unclean and idolatrous world, and he brought the truth of the body before them to correct their tendency to form sects and parties or to act independently. Sectarianism is a carnal thing; it is the practical denial of that one body which the Spirit has formed. To adopt a sectarian principle to-day is really to take a "foreign wife"; it is to espouse a principle which is alien to the present working of God, for, according to truth, we are all part of a divinely formed organism, in which each member has its appointed place, and functions for the benefit of the body. Where the sectarian principle is adopted the clerical principle generally goes with it. I suppose the latter got a footing in the early days of the church through the readiness of the many, in a day of spiritual decline, to let another do the service which was really the privilege and responsibility of all the believing men. It is really a form of unfaithfulness, however unwittingly done.

Then at Colosse there was a tendency to be led away "through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the teaching of men, according to the elements of the world, and not acording to Christ." The human imagination delights in such things as worshipping angels, and prying into what is unseen, but Paul says that the one who would do this is "vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh." But philosophy and human imagination and ordinances and ascetic austerities are really of the world. Those who take up such things are really being fraudulently deprived of their prize; they are being carried away from Christ. They are as guilty of unfaithfulness to God as were those who took "foreign wives" in Ezra's day.

In all the epistles we may see what had to be overcome by faithful saints at the beginning of the church's history: seeking their own things, minding earthly things, loving the world, loving money, the snare of idolatry, the deceit of many anti-christs, Satan's ministers pretending to be apostles of Christ. Now we may be certain that all these

things are present to be a snare to any recovered remnant in our day. Their influence is as much to be dreaded as that of the "foreign wives" of Ezra's day. They have to be met by princely care and watchfulness, and by priestly sensibilities such as we see in Ezra.

"And when I heard this thing, I rent my mantle and my garment, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down overwhelmed," v. 3. Do we feel like this about the things which corrupt "the holy seed" today? One pious person truly feeling things as before God may become a rallying point in an evil day. "Then were assembled to me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the unfaithfulness of those that had been carried away; and I sat overwhelmed until the evening oblation," v. 4.

There is a beautiful touch of grace in "the evening oblation" being brought in here. A well-known servant of the Lord said, 'If you want a man to judge himself you must minister Christ to him.' I think it is on that principle that "the evening oblation" is mentioned here. The "evening oblation" was the offering by fire to Jehovah for a sweet odour of a lamb as a continual burnt-offering, with its oblation and drink-offering. "It shall be a continual burnt-offering throughout your generations," Exod. 29: 42. God would have His people to know that the sweet odour of Christ is the ground on which He dwells in their midst, and is their God. It is there that He meets His people. Now God had not left this ground, though there had been great unfaithfulness on the part of His people, and He would have their repentance and confession to be in the light of it. We might, perhaps, without unduly straining the type, regard the "morning" oblation as setting forth God's precious thought at the beginning of the assembly day, and the "evening oblation" as having its place at the end of that day. Such an application is justified because there cannot possibly be any change in the ground on which God's people are before Him as

accepted. He was with His saints at the beginning of this "accepted time" according to the infinite sweet odour and acceptance of the offering of Christ, and He is still with them on precisely the same ground. In the light of this what do we think of our links with the world, of the "foreign wives" by whom we have been ensnared? It is in seeing what we have been led away from that we get power to judge the influences that have led us away.

So we can understand the very deep sorrow and confession of Ezra. He had in mind the wonderful place of the people as identified in God's thoughts with the sweet odour of the burnt-offering. As remembering this he could not do other than go down to the very lowest point in confession. He felt how unfaithful the people had been to the God who had set the burnt-offering among them throughout their generations. God has fully blessed us through Christ, and in Christ, and has not departed from any of His thoughts about us. Why should we not, in the sense of this marvellous grace, fully and deeply own our shame in forming links with the the world which displace Christ in our hearts? God does not want us to judge ourselves legally, but from the standpoint of the immense favour in Christ in which He has called us. It was on this ground that He appealed to His erring saints in Galatia and at Corinth and elsewhere, and it is on this ground that He appeals to us. It is in getting a revived sense of His grace in Christ that we are brought down to the very bottom in the judgment of ourselves for having yielded to the influence of things which are really worthless. Whatever may be the form which unfaithfulness has taken in any one of us Christ is the power for self-judgment and confession, and also for courage and decision in putting away the influence that has ensnared us. As Christ is brought in and gets His right place with us once more, there is power to detect what is contrary to Him, and to feel its true character before God. What Ezra expressed in his prayer and confession was what the Spirit of Christ felt

about the state of things that existed. If we truly return to a sense that Christ is everything for us before God we shall urgently desire to move into company with the Spirit of Christ about everything that has been a snare to us. We shall want to gather to Ezra as feeling that we have been a grief to Christ, but we want now to be a comfort to Him. Let us all really face before God the truth as to our state and associations.

CHAPTER 10

The tears spoken of in verse 1 were the outcome of a deep moral work in the souls of God's people. There had been nothing like it before. Ezra had not only brought increased light to them, and more complete furnishing for the service of God, but he brought amongst them priestly sensibilities which deeply affected them, and brought about a most blessed work of moral recovery.

Shechaniah made full confession of the unfaithfulness, but his heart was confirmed with grace, for he said, "Yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing," v. 2. After all, there was a great opportunity; unfaithfulness need not continue. The principle of covenant, as expressing a solemn engagement to put away all foreign wives, was available. If there has been unfaithfulness with us the remedy lies in our own hands. Shechaniah says, "Let it be done"; "Be of good courage and do it." And Ezra made the chiefs "to swear that they would do according to this word. And they swore," v. 5. When there has been unfaithfulness there must be definite decision and action. When we have been entangled in some worldly association there is no getting clear without purpose and decision. We must definitely break with those workings of the flesh, and those worldly influences, that have hindered us spiritually. Many a believer knows something that is a

spiritual hindrance to him. Let it be dealt with at once. In getting free from the flesh and the world we have to act. It is very little use praying if we are not prepared to act. We have to put to death the deeds of the body; we have to overcome the world. Every "foreign wife" is really an opportunity for a spiritual victory. A certain spiritual violence is often needed, which the Lord referred to when He said, "The kingdom of the heavens is taken by violence, and the violent seize on it," Matt. 11: 12.

Of course, we clearly understand that, in applying this scripture to our own time, if the unfaithfulness has taken the form of marriage with an unbeliever, this is not a link which can be severed. And it is possible that there may be, under certain circumstances, links wrongly entered into, but which, having been entered into, involve obligations to others which cannot be righteously set aside. In such cases the unfaithfulness has to be owned and confessed, but its consequences have to be accepted as the government of God. In humbling ourselves under His mighty hand we learn by what we have to suffer governmentally, and in due time His mercy may come in for us.

The exercise of Ezra 10 had to be taken up by all "the children of the captivity." They had all to gather themselves together unto Jerusalem, on pain of being "separated from the congregation." The matter involved the honour of Jehovah's name, and therefore everyone must prove himself to be pure in regard to it. If there is definite unfaithfulness with reference to worldly associations, the whole assembly has responsibility as to it. It can never be regarded as a matter of individual liberty. If the Spirit of God raises an exercise as to certain moral conditions, the whole assembly must move with it. If anyone does not share in it he morally ceases to be of the assembly. No independency was tolerated in Ezra's day; much less can it have any sanction when saints are "one body."

This great congregation sitting "in the open space of the house of God, trembling because of the matter, and

because of the pouring rain," v. 9, is expressive of the deep concern with which the whole congregation now regarded the matter. Ezra called upon them to make confession of their unfaithfulness, and to separate themselves from the peoples of the lands, and from the foreign wives. The conscience of the congregation was active, and they answered, "Yes, it is for us to do according to thy words. But the people are many, and it is a time of pouring rain, and it is not possible to stand without; neither is this a work for one day or two." While fully convicted of the gravity of the matter they felt that it could not be dealt with there and then. It was too serious to be dealt with in a general way; each individual case must be soberly considered by the princes as standing for all the congregation, and with them the elders of every city and the judges thereof. Nothing was to be done by mere impulse; there was careful provision that the exercise should be worked out as a matter of principle in every locality concerned. It is a beautiful example of how any serious matter involving the Lord's name should be handled.

It appears from verse 15 that four men stood up against the exercises of the congregation. Their names are inserted as a warning to beware of all such, like certain men whom Paul mentions. Satan will see to it that generally there is some opposition to what is of God, but this must not be allowed to hinder a spiritual exercise from being brought to completion. The whole matter was ended by the first day of the first month. When any decided action which maintains what is due to the Lord is carried through it inaugerates a new year of spiritual prosperity.

The sons of the priests who had taken foreign wives "gave their hand to send away their wives; and they offered a ram of the flock as trespass-offering for their guilt," v. 19. The ram was the appointed trespass-offering when the rights of Jehovah had been infringed, Lev. 5: 15; it signifies a very mature and energetic apprehension of Christ in trespass-offering character. The sense of

assembly failure, and of our own failure in regard to God's holy things, should bring us to that. We are far too light about matters that really involve the rights of God. We do not consider that we can only be cleansed from the guilt of unfaithfulness by Christ being the trespass-offering for it. Failure to maintain separation is a much more serious offence that we are apt to think. We should understand that we are not clear of it before God until we have brought the ram of the trespass-offering.

The names given from verse 18 to the end of the chapter are the names of overcomers; they had all separated themselves to Jehovah. So I believe the last chapter is really the best in the book. There is a depth of moral exercise that had not been seen before, and a more true separation to Jehovah. I believe the Lord intends that *our* last chapter shall be the brightest and best in our history; more self-judgment than ever, more appreciation of Christ, more separation to God, more priestly sensibilities, more suitability for the service of God! The history of the assemblies contains much to grieve over, but let us not forget that the Lord contemplates having an overcomer in every assembly. Whatever has been in the past, let us see to it that we finish as overcomers!

THE BUILDING OF THE WALL

(Substance of Readings)

NEHEMIAH 1

It is remarkable that we have the house built and the service of God set up in Ezra before we come to the thought of the city and the wall which is largely developed in Nehemiah. The first thing in the mind of God is how we approach Him. Hence Ezra is more occupied with what is internal; he speaks of the altar, the house and the service; it is more an internal view of things. Nehemiah is occupied with what is external. The city and the wall refer to the public position; the service of the altar and house is to be safeguarded and preserved. There is a need for the city and the wall.

The first thing in the mind of God is how He is approached. The thought of privilege in relation to God must come first in the mind of God, although it may not in our minds. So in Exodus the instruction as to the tabernacle begins with the ark, and then goes on to what was enshrined in it. We must realise that approach to God and the service of God are great things in the mind of God and then we can take up what is external—the principles of fellowship divinely administered in the assembly. That is necessary if things are to be protected and preserved. Nehemiah gives that side of things; the city and the wall represent what is public. Without the city and the wall the public position is one of affliction and reproach, and that is very much the position in the christian profession today. In the ways of God there is a recovering of things in these last days. There was not much thought of the city and the wall when the saints began to break bread; they thought almost entirely of the Lord's supper as the

privilege of all believers. The test comes when these things have to be protected. When the exercise began among the brethren as to assembly principles and administration, many who were apparently going on well became adversaries.

We find in this chapter that Nehemiah was brought to deep concern because of what he heard of the affliction and reproach of God's people. The wall was in ruins and the gates burned with fire; it filled him with sorrow. That is the first thing. Reproach lay on the people of God that was not the reproach of Christ. *We* have to feel that great reproach rests on the people of God today because of their unfaithfulness. Nehemiah's concern was that the reproach might be taken away. We must differentiate between the reproach of Christ and this kind of reproach. The reproach of Christ is reproach in the eyes of the world, not the reproach spoken of here which is reproach under the eye of God. Those who are faithful bear the reproach of Christ before the world; those who are unfaithful bear reproach under the eyes of God. It is the divine way of recovery that we should be sensitive as to everything that comes on our consciences as not being of God. The condition of the people of God generally, even true christians, is one of great reproach in the eyes of heaven. We have to take up the exercise of it. It is easy to see how true it is of the christian profession, for many things there have no authority or support in Scripture at all; they are a reproach under the eye of God. It arises from the fact that the true principles of christian fellowship have been broken down, and assembly administration has been destroyed, so that we speak of the ruin. J.N.D. was greatly criticised and denounced because he spoke of the ruin, but there it is; what does not answer to the mind of God is a state of ruin. God's intention is that at the end there is to be exercise as to it and a turning to God and to the Lord in prayer and then to the light of Scripture.

Three great outstanding principles come out in this chapter:

(1) Deep exercises as to the ruin.
(2) Prayer.
(3) The Scriptures turned to as affording great confidence notwithstanding all that has taken place.

That is the way of recovery for any of us. God said that, if they repented and turned to Him, He would bring them back to the place where He had set His name even if they had been scattered to the uttermost part of the heavens. It is most encouraging. We have to feel now what was felt at Pentecost. They felt the failure of Israel, but they had not the sorrow of feeling how the assembly had failed. *We* must take up the exercise that the assembly in its public setting is the greatest failure there is in the whole history of the world. Therefore there is nothing for it but to seek the Lord and pray. There is everything in the Lord to be counted on in the darkest day and the time of greatest ruin. The Lord remains. When we come to prayer we are at no disadvantage; we are as well off as they were at Pentecost. Before Pentecost we find they spent ten days in prayer; that is a provision as open to us as it was to them. There is no one to tell us that we cannot pray. At the end of Acts 2 we find that they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and prayers. It is very beautiful to see that those things are as open to us today as they were then—the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers—they are as much within our reach now as they were in Acts 2. It is very comforting and encouraging. We have to get back to what the assembly began with, to have our whole resource in God and in the Lord and in the Spirit. The assembly at Corinth and those meeting all over the world at that time were calling on the name of the Lord. We can still do that, and when we do so we have reached the source of everything. The Lord is as equal to

the darkest day as to the brightest day. I believe the giving up of prayer is the first mark of spiritual decline. People give up private prayer, and then household prayer, and everything for God is over. We have to get back to this great basic fact that, if we are to be anything at all for the Lord, we must be men and women of prayer and feel things more than we do. We get so hardened. Nehemiah was a man of deep exercise; he realised that the wall was in ruins and the gates burned and the people in affliction and reproach, and he turns to God. We have to go the same way; there is no other way of recovery if we want to stand in assembly truth.

If you have the wall, you have things secured. That is the point of teaching in this book, to be able to set up the true principles of the assembly in a day of ruin, principles of divine administration not to be seen in the religious world. It was very encouraging to Nehemiah that Jehovah had said that if the people turned to Him He would bring them back to the place where He had set His name. The Lord will never see His name in unholy conditions. A godly man never leaves himself out when he confesses sins. If I have to speak to the Lord about something wrong in someone else, He always turns me back on myself. It is necessary that we should bring ourselves into this matter. We cannot stand outside the ruin and reproach of the christian profession as spectators; we are all part of it. We are only out of the ruin as standing in the thoughts of God, and when we stand there we have no very flattering estimate of ourselves. We need to be marked by these features: by feeling everything that is a reproach on the people of God, and then turning to the Lord as a resource, calling on the Lord out of a pure heart. We must be exercised as to this, to be standing in the truth of the assembly and the principles of christian fellowship, we must be thoroughly identified with them and completely separated from things around us.

Paul speaks to Timothy of "those that call upon the

Lord out of a pure heart," 2 Tim. 2: 22. "A pure heart" means that there is nothing artificial or hypocritical about us, that we have done with the Pharisee. We are all naturally well-bred Pharisees and we have to get rid of that and have a pure heart. Nehemiah is the line of spiritual exercise for us all. We must not rest on the fact that we have come to outward separation; we must be set to be in the reality of it so that heaven recognises that we call on the Lord out of a pure heart. The Psalms give a good idea of a pure heart. The psalmist confesses his own sins and the sins of God's people; he has a pure heart. No one has a pure heart that does not judge himself. When we are occupied with what is of God, we go on with it and judge all the ruin in the light of what is positively of God. What we find constantly in the Psalms is confession of sin and consciousness of integrity, which go together. Nehemiah takes account of God as keeping covenant and mercy to them that love Him and keep His commandments. He reckoned that there were such persons, so he says in his prayer, "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying . . . if ye return to me, and keep my commandments . . . will I gather them . . . unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there," *vv.* 8, 9. That is what he builds on. There will always be those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart and we want to move along with those people. Nehemiah does not pray that the people may return, but he takes for granted that there will be those who love God and keep His commandments, so he says, "let now thine ear be attentive . . . to the prayer of thy servants who delight to fear thy name", *v.* 11. He takes for granted that there was a company marked by these desires and exercises. So the inward state of our hearts is the great thing.

There was a long interval between the end of Ezra and this chapter showing that when God recovers His work He does not do everything at once. He carries it on by progressive stages. We have seen that in the last hundred years.

The Lord did not bring out everything at first; there was not much thought about principles or administration at the beginning; those exercises gradually developed as the need arose for maintaining separation and for safeguarding the precious things. So the building of the wall is a further exercise, and a constant one to keep up separation as to all those things that are not of God. The principle of separation must be maintained; it is a constant exercise. Nehemiah has the sense too that the matter will depend on the favour of the king. The king was God's representative in this matter. It shows that the king is one who represents a power which God can make of service to His people and testimony. Artaxerxes was not on the same line as Cyrus. Cyrus was raised up by God to build the house and thus was a type of Christ. Artaxerxes was on a lower line, for he was made favourable by observing the condition of Nehemiah. That is the setting. Nehemiah so conducted himself before the king that, when the time came, the king was disposed to be favourable to him. That is one ground on which we might expect the powers that be to be favourable; we are to be marked by subjection. Nehemiah commended himself to Artaxerxes; that is one aspect of the position. We see in certain parts of the world that the powers of government are favourable to what is of God. In those countries where the testimony has had its place we find the powers that be are generally favourable, but where the testimony has had no place the powers are adverse and persecuting. God provides for the protection of His work, and we ought to value the powers that are favourable. Paul says that they are God's ministers to us for good. It is a great thing to see that. Every policeman and soldier is a servant of God, and in that sense he serves the testimony.

NEHEMIAH 2

The exercise of Nehemiah was that the city and its walls might be built. He was conscious that he was a man under authority and that he must not move without authority. It would seem that the king of Persia in this book is viewed as representing divine authority; he had been set up by God. The lesson for us would be that in a day of ruin, when we feel things are broken down and in ruins, we should desire to do something to remedy the state of things for God's advantage and the advantage of His people. We must be careful to act as those who have authority for what they do.

All authority is of God; so today the authorities that exist are not the world, they are of God. We have to distinguish between the world, which is made up of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and the authorities which are of God. The object for which authority is exercised is to repress evil. The government of God is not the world; there is something on earth which is of God. All government is representative of God, all kings and judges; they are for the punishment of evil-doers and the praise of those that do well, and so they represent God. Therefore we respect all authority. We have to distinguish between the world as an evil system and the government of God in it by means of kings, rulers, and magistrates. What would the world be without government? If there were no police or prisons, it would be impossible for God's creatures to live in it under present conditions. God maintains in government a condition of things that is favourable to all His creatures, and of course to His people. It is important to recognise that all authority is of God. To understand the teaching of this chapter we have to look at it in this light. Nehemiah was dependent on the king for his commission and the supply of what he needed for building the city. He acts as a man

under authority; we must be careful that we have authority for what we do. There is a danger of losing sight of that and looking on the authorities of the world as though they belonged to the world morally, for they do not. Positionally the king is representative of God as exercising government for the restraint of evil and the furthering of what is good.

There is a suggestion here of Nehemiah being in a position in which he could minister to the joy of the king. If we apply it spiritually, I thought that was the condition necessary if we are to get support and direction and supply in relation to eradicating the ruin that exists. We must be marked by this feature of offering pleasure to God in our own personal walk and deportment. Paul says to Timothy, 'Study to show thyself approved of God, a vessel to honour, acceptable to the master.' That is important. It made Nehemiah acceptable to the king and he got all his requests. We should be individually exercised to be pleasing to God. We cannot get light as to the state of ruin around, or as to what can be done to remedy it, if we are not personally pleasing to God.

Then we find that Nehemiah has a new exercise. He had never been sad before. He heard from these brethren who came from Jerusalem about the dreadful state there and it awakened a new exercise in his soul and made him a sad man. It is good when an exercise begins in our hearts as to the state of things in the christian profession. It is an exercise that God would give us to feel, that the public christian profession is one of great reproach to God; the walls are broken down and the gates burned with fire. The holy separation which marked the people of God is broken down and the administration which rightly marked the assembly is burned with fire. We often speak of our joys and happiness, but God is looking that we should be sad. As it says of Timothy, "remembering thy tears"; that is a very important side of things. Do we feel for God as to the broken state of things? If we do not feel like that, we

shall not be very serviceable in building the city and wall. Nehemiah is instruction for us as to how something can be built up for God and the good of His people in a day of ruin. The first thing is to think of God and the reproach that rests on God by reason of the state of things among those who profess to be His people.

There were others besides Nehemiah "who delight to fear thy name." It will always be so; any true spiritual exercise will never be confined to one person. Paul had Timothy and others who were a comfort to him. In the darkest day there will always be a company sharing the same exercises. Even Jeremiah was not left alone; there were those who befriended him.

Nehemiah moved in his own exercises and that is important for us. We are so apt to move like a flock of sheep, all going one way without much exercise. Individual exercises are most important in a day of ruin. I ought not to have to be supported by the faith of others. This great work required all hands to help it on. As to matters of fellowship they require all hands. Nobody is let off; each one has to be true to this principle of fellowship. In the next chapter each one builds his bit, all going together. God does not limit His work to one individual. It would not be suitable in the assembly for God to give exercise to only one. Any spiritual exercise is shared by all those in the current of the Spirit; all move together.

While Nehemiah was sad as to the state of things at Jerusalem, he did not settle down to that. There are a vast number of christians today who are sad and grieved by what they see and hear, but they leave it at that and just go on, whereas Nehemiah was a man of action. His request to the king was, "If it please the king . . . that thou wouldest send me to Judah . . . that I may build it," *v.* 5. He was not content to be a silent, sorrowful man because of what he had heard, but he wanted to move in the matter. There were the walls to be built and the gates set up and he was a man of action. It ought to affect us

much that the principles of fellowship and the truth of the assembly and its administration can be set up again, in principle, even in a day of ruin. That is the teaching of Nehemiah.

In Matthew 18 the Lord speaks of the assembly. He says, "if *two* of you." He attaches the same provision and power to two as He did to the assembly. It shows that the principles of the assembly can be worked out if necessary by two. They could not be worked out by one; at least two are necessary. "Two of you" means two who have assembly exercises and light. You can have anything you ask for. "Where two or three are gathered . . . to my name, there am I in the midst of them." If He is there, what more do we want? The assembly in its brightest day had nothing greater than the presence of the Son of God. All the principles of the assembly can be enjoyed today in spite of the ruin and failure. It is people like Nehemiah, who are really concerned about matters, that understand these things. In 2 Timothy we find the kind of material that can be used in building; we cannot build without material. If we read 2 Timothy carefully we shall see the sort of material that is useful for God's building operations. God has to provide it and it is provided by His work in the souls of His people. It speaks of the king first; there is material which the king has at his disposal needed to build the city and walls. 2 Timothy speaks of faithful men. Paul exhorts Timothy to pass on what he had to faithful men. The first thing to look for in connection with assembly material is faithfulness. I look with confidence on a man or woman who is faithful to the light he or she has; it is a bit that God can use. God provides suitable material. Timothy largely describes the kind of material suitable for God to use in a day of ruin: faithful men; those who live piously in Christ Jesus; those who follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. All that is fine timber; they are those who are "in Christ Jesus," words occurring

seven times in 2 Timothy. That is the kind of material for the house, not the man after the flesh but the man in Christ Jesus. Paul writes in 2 Timothy, "according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." He has the thought of living material, as Peter speaks of living stones. God has found some material even in these last days; He has found a few hearts who grieve over the ruin of the assembly and seek to build and set up divine principles on the ancient foundation and to establish the truth of separation. There are a goodly number of hearts set on these things.

Then there was opposition. Any move made in consideration for God and the welfare of His people is sure to find Sanballats and Tobijahs who grieve over it. It is in 2 Timothy that Paul refers to persons who opposed—Hymenaeus, Philetus and Alexander; they opposed the ministry. They may have been prominent men amongst the brethren, but adversaries of the work of God. Tobijah had a link with the people of God; he was an Ammonite, descended from Lot, but he turned out to be an enemy all through. It is interesting to see that, although there was so much opposition and difficulty put in the way, yet the work went on to completion.

We have an important exercise brought before us in this chapter. People surveying the state of ruin cannot expect to have the help of God unless they understand what the need really is. So Nehemiah's first exercise after arriving at Jerusalem was to see what the state of things really was; this is an exercise very important for us all, emphasising the importance of private exercise with God. None of us can move publicly beyond the measure of our private exercise with God. If we are true we shall accept that. It is like Paul's three years in Arabia, where we do not read of his doing anything. There is no word of his preaching there; he is going through things in private and personal exercise. If our public action goes beyond our private and secret exercise, it is sure to come to nothing.

We are apt to be in a hurry to do what we see to be right and let the public movement go beyond our measure of private exercise and that leads to failure. There was not the measure of spiritual exercise with the rulers that there was with Nehemiah. It is always distracting to take counsel with those less spiritual than ourselves. When people decline, they seek the company of those inferior, and that accelerates departure; we should seek the company of people more spiritual than ourselves. See how the Philippians clung to Paul; he could speak of their fellowship from the first day to now. Others turned away from him, but *they* clung to him, and it was their salvation. We all have the opportunity of keeping company with the best saints and servants the Lord ever had. We should value things secretly so that we avail ourselves of what there is for us. First of all there are the Scriptures; there are men of God, Peter, Paul and John, waiting on us and ready to give their company at any time. What is to hinder me from being a close companion of Peter or Paul or John? Let us give our minds *wholly* to the ministry, so that we get on. We do not keep good company when alone; we want to keep in company with the blessed servants of God in our private life.

Nehemiah, in going to take account of the ruin, goes by night; it is a private matter. He goes out by the valley-gate; that is the way to go to take account of the ruin. The valley-gate suggests going out in a lowly spirit. When Paul had to survey the ruin at Corinth he says, "out of much tribulation and distress of heart I wrote to you with many tears"—he went out by the valley-gate. That is the only way we can take account of the state of ruin—in the spirit of tears, not in a censorious spirit. The Lord puts His people through exercises of that kind. When the Lord was going to send a solemn message to the assemblies by His servant John, He put John through tremendous excercise. John says, "when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." John needed that exercise; he went out by the

valley-gate. That is the only spirit in a day of ruin that will answer the divine purpose. Nehemiah went back by the valley-gate, too; that is suggestive of that lowly spirit that feels things with God. When he comes to think of sources of refreshment that were once available and are not now, he feels it intensely. "And I went out by night by the valley-gate, even toward the jackal-fountain, and to the dung-gate." The jackal-fountain would seem to speak of what is evil, apparently a source of refreshment, but the power of evil in it. The Lord makes us acquainted with the evil teaching that has found its place in the ruin of the assembly publicly; He would have us in a lowly spirit to take account of the evil teaching. We do not need to read bad books to know what the evil is, for we learn it from the Scriptures. Scripture speaks of the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes and of Balaam, and the woman Jezebel. The Lord calls attention to the sources of evil teaching; none have arisen or will arise that are not in Scripture. Some say today that there is no resurrection from the dead, but we do not need to read their books; Scripture reveals all bad teaching. We read that there are already many antichrists; so we know about the evil teaching that has come into the assembly. All this is connected in my mind with the dragon well or jackal-fountain. We are warned of every kind of evil that will come in. We are not groping in the dark as to evil.

Then the dung-gate has most important instruction. It is the ruin of the dung-gate that has been so disastrous in the history of the assembly. The dung-gate speaks of the refusal of everything that would be a gain to us according to the flesh. Paul tells us in Philippians of what wonderful things he had to his credit as a man in the flesh and yet they all went out by the dung-gate; he counted them all filth. It was not wickedness, but his religion and the advantages he possessed as a good Jew; they went out by the dung-gate. The dung-gate was very soon burned with fire in the history of the assembly. If we are going to take

account of the ruin we must do so first as it applies to ourselves. Have we known what it was to make use of the dung-gate? The flesh in its religion is filth. It is according to the excellence of the knowledge of Christ that Paul measures things. There is a volume of instruction in these things, and if we do not work them out for ourselves in secret exercise we shall not be in the mind of God at the present time.

Then there is the fountain-gate and the king's garden; there is a beautiful spiritual suggestion there. The fountain-gate is a most interesting place, for it brings in the thought of the Spirit. In the next chapter we read, in verse 15, "And the fountain-gate repaired Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the chief of the district of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up its doors, its locks and its bars, and the wall of the pool of Shelah by the king's garden, and to the stairs that go down from the city of David." That all stands connected with the fountain-gate, and is full of spiritual suggestions. God complained of His people through Isaiah that they refused Siloam's waters that flowed softly. Shelah, or Siloam, referred to what God sent in grace. What He sent by the prophet Isaiah was the promise of Immanuel. To get any spiritual vision we have to come to Siloam. The fountain-gate is the spiritual climax of the next chapter. We shall see there that as the different gates were built, they lead up to the fountain-gate as a climax. The next chapter is of the deepest interest, for the only way to the city is by the gates and I hope we all want to go in. We are told that those who wash their robes have the *right* to go in, and there is no other way but by the gates.

In this night exercise of Nehemiah's, he was allowed to see the ruin; when he comes to the fountain-gate there was no way to pass. The great spiritual refreshment properly belonging to the presence of the Spirit was not available.

Then the king's pool is a beautiful suggestion. It turns us to the Song of Songs and shows that when the Spirit

of God has His way He brings fruit into the garden. He can come in and eat His pleasant fruits. In a day of ruin God calls attention to the great principle attaching to the assembly—love. We live in the enjoyment of all the blessings proper to the assembly; if not we are in a state of ruin.

The principal exercise in Nehemiah's case was as to Jerusalem, and we have to go through this exercise. God has put it in inspired words to indicate to us that there is no other way to the assembly in a day of ruin. It works out collectively in the next chapter, but the individual must come first. This night exercise is most important. We ought not to set these things aside as though meaningless. All that is connected with the Spirit and the king's garden and the stairs that go down from the city of David is full of spiritual suggestion. It speaks of what is to be enjoyed by saints of the assembly. It raises the question with every one of us, Am I sharing with the brethren in the enjoyment of these precious things? If not, I am in a state of ruin, and the sooner I go to God about it the better. To take account of the ruin is the first thing, but we must not stop there; it leads to Nehemiah calling the attention of others to it, "Ye see the distress that we are in . . . and they strengthened their hands for the good work," chap. 2: 17, 18. God gives His people courage to set up principles that have been broken down; not in our case to restore the assembly, but to set up in our souls and associations principles that belong to the assembly. When we move on those lines the hand of God will be upon us.

Sanballat and Tobijah set forth the opposition of the flesh to all that is of God. They were adversaries; Nehemiah says to them, "Ye have no portion, nor right, or memorial in Jerusalem." They had nothing to do with the building of God's city; they were opposed to it. They tried to draw Nehemiah into fellowship with them. There are powers and influences at work today in opposition to

what God is doing and Satan will see to it that influence is brought to bear in opposition to what God is doing. What is going on at this point is that the people are encouraged to rise up and build, and they strengthened their hands for the good work. Notwithstanding the ruin it is an encouraging thought that the hand of God is on the man who feels the ruin. There is ability to do things; there is something for every hand to do. This work of building the wall and setting up the gates is going on; there is some part in that work for each one of us. Heaven is with us in maintaining principles of separation from the world which marked the assembly at the beginning. Each one of us has to put our hands to that work. We either build up principles which are of God, or pull them down; that is obvious to each of us. Something goes on in the souls of the saints, for the building is now done there, and in the next chapter all are viewed as having part in it. Some did not put their hands to the work, but, speaking generally, all did. In the fellowship we all put our hands to it; we are definitely committed to the working out of what is of God.

NEHEMIAH 3: 1—13

This chapter brings before us God's thought to have a city here; God is Himself the great city builder. There is a marked contrast to the first city built. Satan seems to have been allowed in the actual course of events in this world to anticipate God. The thought of a city was in the mind of God, but it made its first appearance in Satan's world. The thought of kings was in the mind of God, but they first made their appearance in the world as under Satan's ordering. God will have a wonderful city, and it would appear that, while the cities of the nations are still standing in their greatness and glory, God would introduce the features of His city. There is one description

of the saints which perhaps we do not dwell upon as much as other descriptions and that is that they are fellow-citizens, showing that the city idea has place now.

The city has its own character and constitution. The thought suggested in the scripture before us particularly is that it has a wall and gates. In a sense it is self-contained, unique in its character as distinguished from all around it. That is marked in the closing verses of the Bible. We see the difference between what is within and without. Purity and blessedness are within the city, and without are dogs and every kind of evil. Those who have washed their robes have the right to go through the gates into the city.

We have seen that Nehemiah went out by night to survey the ruin in secret exercise with God—he surveyed the conditions. We should go out with holy exercise to see the terrible ruin, but we should not be content to leave it at that. Many pious persons are conscious of the ruin and mourn over false teaching and worldliness, the sectarian character and spirit that has come into display, but they do not arise to build. Nehemiah had not only pious sentiments but he was a man of action; divine thoughts were brought into some concrete expression. All this fits into 2 Timothy, where we are exhorted to follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. It is very constructive. It is not mere separation from what is wrong—that in itself is too negative to be pleasing to God; we must have the constructive side.

The gates set forth symbolically certain great principles which always mark what is of God as here in the world and apart from which there is no entrance into the city. The sheep-gate comes first. It is of primary importance that we should apprehend the thought of divine election as taught by John. There are certain persons whom the Lord recognises as His own sheep; it is entirely a matter of divine election. Viewed as sheep we belonged to the

Father before we belonged to the Son. This is not our first apprehension, but it is thus presented in John. John 10 is the great unfolding of what stands connected with the sheep-gate. The Lord said to the Father in chapter 17, "they were thine, and thou gavest them me." To have an intelligent part in the city we must apprehend what the saints are according to sovereignty, according to divine calling; otherwise there will be no proper measure of the character of the separation becoming to the people of God. Our right conception of separation depends on our seeing that it is a matter of God's election. If we apprehend that the Father claimed us in His purpose to give us to Christ, and that we are of value to the Father and Son, what a separating effect it will have! We need to have built up in our souls the truth of divine sovereignty, through which we have been made Christ's sheep and have life eternal. "I and my Father are one," means that They are one in mind and purpose in regard to the sheep. What a holy scene we are brought to! This is the only gate built by the priests. The thought of locks and bars does not enter into the thought of the flock, and that is the spiritual reason why they are not mentioned. The flock is not held by restraint or by a fold, but by the attraction of the Shepherd. He has knowledge of all the sheep; they hear His voice and follow Him. He has made Himself divinely known to the sheep and He gives them life eternal. That is the thought of what the sheep are as a divine conception. The Lord does not say that the sheep ought to hear His voice; He speaks of the thing in its divine character. If I see that, I pray that it may be true of me.

We shall not enter intelligently into the character of the city in its present position apart from apprehending this. It is a priestly and hallowed matter. The things belonging to the Father and Son are holy. We have to move into the region of the Father and Son to get a proper apprehension of the one flock that belongs to the one Shepherd. The thought of the flock is one of those thoughts which are

attached in common to Israel and to the saints of the assembly. There are many thoughts connected with Israel and with the assembly; for instance, the house of God, the kingdom, the temple, and the flock, are all thoughts that appear in the Old Testament. They are not wholly new thoughts, but they take an entirely new character. The thought of being Jehovah's flock suggests the divine shepherd-care which was true of saints in Old Testament times. He led Israel like a flock through the wilderness. It was as precious and real to faith in Israel as it is in the saints of the assembly. I do not think God allows any of His thoughts to lapse; they are carried on in a spiritual way in the assembly. The kingdom, the house, and the flock, were all attached to Israel, and they are now brought in in a spiritual way. We are now not only His brethren morally but we are His brethren spiritually as having a place with His Father and God. We start with a conception purely divine. We do not, in the actual history of our souls, begin with that, but God gives us a picture of things that will help us. The difference between being before and after Christ is immense. There was no greater born of women than John the baptist, yet a little one in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. The ministry of the apostle John was largely on this line. He speaks of the saints as born of God, a sovereign action of God. It is a divine and holy action which imprints a divine character. He that is born of God cannot sin; it shows the holy character. In the sense of John 10 the Lord does not lay down His life for every one; He lays down His life for *the sheep*. It is the outlook from the standpoint of sovereignty. It is quite different when we get one sheep out of a hundred as in Matthew. The Shepherd goes after the lost sheep there, *if so be* He find it. The thought of hallowing connects in my mind with what we are speaking of, the holy character of all connected with God's election. He calls us with a holy calling. Holiness is imprinted upon us. If we apprehended this it would have a wonderful

effect upon us. It is what the saints are by divine calling. God's calling is outside responsibility. Whom He foreknew He predestinated; it is all on the line of divine sovereignty. It is a chain of gold links from eternity to eternity, and not one link will ever be broken or put out of its place.

Then there is the fish-gate. The Lord had in mind the thought of fish, and the first thing He suggested to His disciples was that they should catch men. The fish-gate answers to responsibility in service; it gives us the other side. Sovereignty is emphasised in connection with the sheep-gate, and responsibility in service and its results are connected with the fish-gate. In connection with this gate the thought of good fish is important. Responsibility in service is always a matter of skill, care and discrimination, it is an important side of things, and is brought before us in many scriptures. "Who then is Apollos, and who Paul? Ministering servants, through whom ye have believed," 1 Cor. 3: 5. Responsibility in service carried on has certain results. The importance of having fins and scales is emphasised. If we have the sense of divine sovereignty we know we can do nothing unless God prospers it, but care and discrimination are required. In Matthew 13 they sit down and make a selection, and put the good fish into vessels and cast the worthless away. That is what is going on now. 2 Timothy is putting the good fish into vessels; those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart are good fish. The vessels are local assemblies for the good fish.

The fish-gate gives a wider scope of things than the sheep-gate, for it brings us to what is universal. Fishing is to catch men. The sea suggests what is universal, and the thought is to catch men and bring them out of it for God. We can all see the importance of these two great principles put together. These are the only two gates which are said to be built, which shows the importance of what is suggested; the principle of divine sovereignty in

connection with the sheep-gate, and the principle of responsibility in service in connection with the fish-gate. If we do not understand these two principles we shall make no headway towards the city. These are foundation principles. These two gates were entirely lost in christendom and so had to be rebuilt; the others were repaired. This indicates a special significance in these two gates, and the principles suggested in them are vital. If we are not right in our souls as to divine sovereignty or responsibility in service, it would be useless to go further in the development of the gates.

It was never the Lord's thought that people should be converted and left alone. Our responsibility in service is to get all the good fish into vessels. There are those in the christian profession who are worthless in regard of the city idea. None but good fish go in by the fish-gate. There are those in the christian profession whom we can but regard as worthless in regard of God's present thought. This would help us if we saw that all is in view of the fountain-gate, the enjoyment together in assembly conditions of what is spiritual, that which gives pleasure to Christ. There are those whom the Lord rejected, and whom we have to reject, especially in relation to this thought of the city, which is something enshrined in the present thoughts of God. It stands as a city on a hill that cannot be hid. You look out for the qualifications in a person, not merely in what they say. You look for fins and scales. I knew a man who professed to be converted on a Sunday night, and on the Monday night he was found in the public house; he was a bad fish without fins or scales. The thought of selection is a great principle in Scripture. The fins are that by which the fish takes a straight course through the element surrounding it. The scales are preservative and keep it from pernicious influences. You look for a young convert to take a straight course and go against the stream; he has scales, protecting armour. Paul, in writing to the Romans, speaks of the armour of light—

protection. All that enters into the thought of good fish. Most of those brought into blessing have shown evidence of divine work before professing faith in Christ. It was a great help to me before I was converted to be thrown into the company of the most wicked set of men I had ever had to do with. I felt that, if I did not make some sort of stand, I would be done. That is the sort of feeling in a soul with no knowledge of salvation.

A good convert looks out for people like himself or better than himself. He has precious thoughts of Christ and he looks out for other people with precious thoughts of Christ, and if he finds someone with more than he has he is very pleased. That is how a young convert finds the fellowship. Great principles are connected with the sheep-gates and fish-gates.

Now we move on to *the gate of the old wall*, which may have reference to that principle of separation which has been set up from of old, indeed, which always marked off the saints from the earliest point of God's dealings with men. It is not new to the assembly. This great matter of separation is an ancient principle of God's grace. We have fallen on times when it is badly in need of repair. The great thought of the wall is separation, a security brought about on the principle of separation. It has marked the saints in all ages, before and after the flood and all down the ages. It is an old principle that has to be repaired; it marked men like Enoch and Noah, who walked with God. We shall only enter into God's city as this principle is repaired in our souls and associations—the principle of separation from what is not of God. We could not enter the city on any other principle. Withdrawing from unrighteousness—that is an old wall. There has always been a tendency to slip away. In Hebrews we are told to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard lest we slip away, showing the danger of slipping away from what is of God. Peter, in his epistle, stirs up the minds of the saints by way of remembrance, showing that

things were in need of repair. The principle of separation is essential. People talk about narrowness if saints seek to walk in separation, but are they narrow? It is the people who *say* these things that are narrow. The most separate man is bound to be the widest man in sympathies, light and intelligence. He is the man who has great thoughts, so that separation is the way of enlargement. As Paul tells the Corinthians, "Be ye also enlarged." How? "Come out . . . and be ye separate" is the way of enlargement.

Even in Israel we see the principle of separation. Godly Israelites were by their godliness bound to be separate. If we put ourselves on common ground with people of the world we shall slip away from what is of God in our own souls. We cannot be at home with those who are of the world without slipping away from what is of God. We all have to see to it that we are in separation. How searching it is! "They are not of the world, as I am not of the world"—that is the principle of separation.

Then the valley-gate has a very searching voice for us. We might say with all reverence that the Lord Himself came in by the valley-gate. He came in by the manger and went out by the cross. The valley-gate secures a large measure of separation, an essential kind of separation. The principle of the valley-gate would secure things for God; it would have reference to those who, like the Lord, do not move in the activity of their own wills but are in subjection. The valley-gate is Philippians 2, the dung-gate is Philippians 3. The valley-gate sets forth that principle of humiliation seen in absolute perfection in the Lord. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." It is to be the real thing, and apart from it there is no entering into God's city. We can only walk together on the principle of the valley-gate. Paul speaks of "all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love"—that is the valley-gate. We cannot enjoy spiritual things apart from that. We have no idea how our high thoughts of ourselves stand in the way of our

happiness. Very few of us are aware what miserable offenders we are against our spiritual joy.

NEHEMIAH 3: 13—32

It is well to keep in mind that the gates set forth the way by which we enter into what is of God; certain principles being set forth in the different gates, and these principles have to be set up and maintained in our souls if we are to have access to the precious privileges which are the portion of the saints. The teaching of the gates is of the greatest importance for us all. The crowning point in connection with the gates of the city is the fountain-gate, which seems to be connected with the Spirit and therefore requires spiritual persons to enter into it. The previous gates would indicate how spirituality is developed and maintained, which is by separation and by that spirit of self-humbling set forth in the valley-gate, and the refusal of all that would give us self-importance as set forth in the dung-gate. These things would give us spirituality, which we require in order to enter into what is set forth in the fountain-gate.

The apostle says in Philippians, "I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." That is the dung-gate. All those things which would give him importance as a man in the flesh he absolutely rejects as filth; all had to go out by the dung-gate. That is very important. We all have to learn it; we all have points by which self-importance would come in. Peter was anxious to retain his reputation as a good Jew, but it had to go out by the dung-gate. These things which the apostle called filth are things which people would be proud of, not ashamed of. The things we are proud of are more offensive to God than anything else.

Uzziah did not make use of the valley-gate; his heart was lifted up to his destruction. That is true of any of us,

and therefore the valley-gate is most important. When the disciples asked the Lord who was the greatest, He set a little child in their midst and said, "Unless ye are converted and become as little children, ye will not at all enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, *he* is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens," Matt. 18: 3, 4. That is the answer in the New Testament to the valley-gate. These warnings are for us and stand in connection with the principles of christian fellowship. That is the teaching of this chapter; it sets forth in a symbolical way the great principles of fellowship, how we walk together as a united company in separation from the world, which the wall speaks of, and in humbling ourselves and refusing all that the flesh boasts in, so that we become spiritual. None of us would like to be stamped permanently with the character of being carnal.

In the fountain-gate we come to what requires spirituality. If we do not walk in separation and humility, refusing all that would make something of the flesh, we shall not be spiritual, and we shall not enjoy the spiritual privileges connected with the fellowship. None of us should merely be content with knowing we have the Spirit, and perhaps be grieving Him all the time.

A man who has been through these three gates, a man who walks in holy separation from the world, refusing all that gives importance to the flesh, that man is a spiritual man. It is a very practical exercise. If we are not enjoying the spiritual gain of the fellowship it is a sad condition to be in. The Lord said in John, "the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life"; that is the fountain-gate. It is the only one of the gates said to be covered, suggesting that it speaks of what is not public; it is only known privately by those who enter. What is spiritual is private; it belongs to the spiritual. It says distinctly that the natural man cannot know the things of God. That is what is suggested by

being covered; it is not an open and public matter, but private. The saints as walking together in the fellowship have secret joys known only to themselves, and a stranger does not meddle with them. We do not want to go on only outwardly with things, but inwardly. What is the good of fellowship if we are not going on with the inward joys of it? It is an empty form, and all becomes formal, orthodox and dry. The spiritual side of the fellowship is only known by the spiritual; it is a private matter. This should have a great effect on the service of God. When they carried the tabernacle through the wilderness, all was covered, showing that the holy things are not to be exposed, they are to be covered.

The public witness is maintained as we walk in separation. Separation of walk is very important, and then a lowly spirit of dependence on God for everything, refusing all the pride of the flesh. All these enter into the public witness. The instruction of this chapter is to show how the things of God are maintained in separation from everything else. The principles on which they are entered into are set forth in the gates. A spiritual person is a testimony all the time.

Then there is a spiritual ministry set forth in the pool of Siloam. It is necessary to be spiritual to enjoy the ministry. Carnal people could not enjoy spiritual ministry. The ministry of Christ is found within the circle of christian fellowship. The word 'Siloam' means 'sent.' The prophet Isaiah refers to it when he says, "this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah which flow softly," Isa. 8: 6. They set forth the precious ministry of Christ coming out through Isaiah. Where does the precious ministry of Christ come from today? That is what we are to be after. We are very dependent on spiritual ministry for ability to see things. People who pay no attention to ministry never see anything. The blind man washed at the pool of Siloam and came seeing. We are told too what he did see; he saw Christ. How he grew in his apprehension of Him! He

began by saying, "a man called Jesus," and he finished by worshipping Him as the Son of God. That was the result of washing at the pool of Siloam. The thing is to *wash* in the ministry and that means that the Person of Christ becomes great to us. We must allow the ministry to exercise its power on us so that we get an apprehension of Christ that is of a spiritual order; that is most important. If we walk together in the fellowship, what is our object? It ought to be that we want all to be where the waters of Siloam flow softly. The pool of Siloam is a type of all spiritual ministry. We ought to look and pray for more spiritual ministry. We should not come together for a reading without exercise that there should be spiritual ministry. If the waters of Siloam do not flow in the meetings for ministry, we shall find that the saints will not come.

The king's garden is another thing. These are a beautiful collection of spiritual thoughts which are most instructive. All spiritual ministry has in view that we come under the influence of impressions of Christ; the result of that will be that there will be something for His pleasure, and that is the king's garden. The Song of Songs speaks of that in chapter 4: 12. All this is the spiritual side of the fellowship; there is a fresh action of the Holy Spirit in connection with the fountain and there is spiritual ministry at the pool of Siloam, a ministry sent from the Lord. That is what we want on all occasions, not a ministry that a brother has looked up before he came. The result is that spiritual features are developed which become delightful to the Lord as His garden. The Lord looks at each one, and points out something beautiful to Him about each one. He views the saints as having features proper to His sister or spouse. We should all covet to have these features so as to be conscious that the Lord loves us. John speaks of himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. John was conscious all the time that Jesus loved him because he was lovable. The Lord saw John as a beautiful plant in His garden. So with Peter, who at one time said, "Lord,

if it be thou, bid me come unto thee." The Lord delighted in that. Thomas, also, said, "Let *us* also go, that we may die with him." The Lord appreciated that and loved him for it. The king's garden speaks of the saints as attractive to the Lord, so that what goes on all the week enters into this. What has the Lord seen in me all the week to make Him pleased to see me come in at the door on Lord's day morning? Has He seen me do an act of kindness for His sake, or speak of Him, or help some poor needy saint? Have we found pleasure in reading the Word and ministry of His servants? All these things enter into what the saints are as the king's garden. These are the fruits that come out and bring pleasure to the Lord, and then He delights to see us come in at the door on Lord's day morning. He will say something about every brother or sister. We can all bring forth something as the king's garden. There are some choice things contributed by sisters, Hannah's song and Mary's and Deborah's. There are many hymns written in our hymn-book by sisters. There is something for the Lord in all that. It is not simply what we say to Him when we come together; the Lord looks at what we have been in our homes and business life, the things that He can have pleasure in all the time. All that enters into the king's garden.

This brings out in a figurative way the features and gain of the christian fellowship and what the Lord gets through the saints walking together in the christian fellowship. This refers to our actual responsible life here; sisters are not to speak in the assembly, but that does not say they are not to bring rich contributions to the assembly. The hymns written by sisters are a rich contribution to the assembly. Every sister should covet to bring a rich contribution.

We have the general thought of the fountain-gate, and then certain things associated with it, and then there is a beautiful suggestion that we are not to stop on that level, precious as it is. The stairs go down, but they are used for

going up. The actual use of the stairs was for going up, showing that there is something higher and more spiritual than anything mentioned yet—something we have to go up to. Paul could not speak of those things to the Corinthians; they were not spiritual enough. "Revealed to *us* by his Spirit" is apostolic. If we are in the gain of the christian fellowship and all that is spiritual in that fellowship, that is not the end. God has something more wonderful and precious still to set forth in these stairs, which go down from the city of David. It refers to what is connected with Christ as no longer known after the flesh, what is connected with Christ in His precious place as risen and glorified, which is outside all here, even the christian fellowship. The Supper should be the King's garden. Brothers and sisters, having been delightful to the Lord through the week, come together to remember Him and eat His supper. That is all connected with the fellowship. But it is possible, after that experience, blessed as it is, to go up to another level. The depths of God are what God has cherished in His love and thoughts before the foundation of the world. The depths of God bring out the greatest heights; if we go down to the depths in the heart of God we come to the highest point of blessing. The youngest of us should understand that is something different from the fellowship. In the fellowship we come together to break bread as people who have pleased the Lord all the week. If we have not, we shall give Him no pleasure when we come together. We break bread to remember the Lord and praise Him; all that is connected with the fellowship, but then there is something else which the Lord would have us think about. There is another region which speaks of our being risen with Christ. That is wholly spiritual because we are not actually risen; it is outside the range of mind and sense and all that is natural. Scripture speaks of our being made to sit down together in the heavenlies, and we have to go up the stairs for that.

This chapter presents a wonderful picture designed by the Spirit of God to help us as to the fellowship. We must all recognise that there is no reality in it if we do not take character from these things. It is a matter for prayer with each of us; we do not set up to say these things are true but to earnestly desire that they may be true. We have to build these different gates, make these principles good in our own souls. This chapter is what the saints do; it is the responsible side. Nehemiah saw how all was broken down and he went to work so that what was broken down might be built up.

All this is most important for all of us. If I was converted only last night, it applies to me to be in separation from the world and from all that is displeasing to God. I am to walk in spiritual humility, refusing what makes much of myself, then I shall want to enjoy and get the spiritual gain of the christian fellowship. It is for new-born babes to go in for these things as well as for us all.

AN OUTLINE OF THE MASCHIL PSALMS

PSALM 32

C.A.C. The thought in our minds in this series of meetings is that we learn from Scripture that God intends to have a company on the earth in these last days marked by wisdom. They are spoken of in Daniel, chapters 11 and 12, as "the wise"—the Maschilim; and it was suggested that the Maschil Psalms, the Psalms of instruction, would have a special place with those who are spoken of as the wise or instructed ones. It must be manifest to any exercised soul that we are in the last days, in that period of the church's history which corresponds with the period in Daniel, chapters 11 and 12, which relates to Israel; so it is of all importance that we should be wise, instructed.

The first of these is Psalm 32, and that gives us the knowledge of God as brought to us in the glad tidings. We have the blessedness of knowing our sins forgiven, sin covered, all guile removed, a purged conscience, the Spirit given—God made known as a Justifier, Deliverer, Director and Spring of joy. That is in substance what the gospel brings to us. This psalm is a gospel psalm, it brings to us the blessings of the new covenant as known in the gospel and enjoyed by the Spirit—that is the first great instruction that God would impart to us.

It is well for us always to remember that the saints are the subjects of divine instruction. There is no deeper blessing in the new covenant order of things than, "They shall be all taught of God"; the Lord Himself quotes this. It does not mean merely to be instructed in Scripture. One might take a class of boys and girls and teach them the Scriptures and expound their meaning; that is very blessed, but that is not the instruction we have before us in these 'maschil' or 'instruction' psalms; they bring out

that in which God would have us instructed. In them the soul is learning God and Christ through many deep soul exercises. We must each go through these deep exercises; we cannot learn only from a book. It is obvious to anyone reading the Psalms that there is not one that does not involve a great deal of exercise in learning it. The Psalms are a wonderful part of Scripture, there is so much soul-history in them. We should not go to the Psalms for doctrine, but for soul experiences and to see how God is learnt.

Psalm 32 is the way we arrive at the knowledge of God as He will be known by Israel in the new covenant. It opens the subject of forgiveness and non-imputation of sin; the rest of the psalm follows on the knowledge of this. We can confidently say that this is an experience that the Lord never had. He is brought before us in many of the earlier psalms, and it is in view of what He is as presented there in His beauty and perfection that the soul has any due sense of sin.

We must remember that the numbering of the Psalms is inspired, so they are in divine order; they are not like the chapters of the Bible, which are man's arrangement, or like a hymn-book where the hymns may be in any order. We read for instance, "It is written in the second psalm." We cannot transpose the psalms.

Now Psalm 32 comes in after a wonderful unfolding of the Person of Christ, morally, personally and sacrificially; and also of His death, His resurrection, His ascension and glory. Such an experience as that of Psalm 32 follows upon knowing Christ as unfolded in the previous psalms.

The first book of Psalms, that is, Psalms 1—41, is a most wonderful part of Scripture. It is full of the Man of God's good pleasure, God's Anointed; it begins with the blessedness of that Man and ends with the same One set before God's face for ever. Think of such Psalms as 1, 2, 8, 16, 22, 24. They present the Christ of God, the Son of God. If He comes in we cannot be astonished that there

is forgiveness for sinful men. His coming in liberated the heart of God; all the love and grace of forgiveness was in God's heart. He had made Himself known as forgiving iniquity as "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," but His heart was not set free until Christ came and the work was accomplished. God introduces His anointed Son in Psalm 2, "Thou art my Son." Then He is the Son of man in Psalm 8, the One who can make Jehovah's Name excellent in all the earth, and all is put under His feet. In Psalm 16 we see His moral perfections as walking here before God, separate from the idolatrous world, and making those who love God, the excellent of the earth, His companions. What an unfolding is Psalm 22 of the work of Christ! And as the result of that work God's name is declared to the brethren, and there is singing in the midst of the assembly. As we have Christ before us, and His work and resurrection, we can understand how the heart of God is free to come out in new covenant character. He is free to teach us in spite of all we have been and still are. He can unfold Christ to us and the result of His coming in. Psalm 32 is one of the most blessed unfoldings of it in the Old Testament.

In the Psalms we have the inward feelings of Christ; His feelings and experiences. We do not find that so much in the gospels; there we find rather His words and acts. It is a great thing to read the Psalms so as to find Christ there. They are more read by believers universally than any other part of Scripture, but it is usually to get comfort, and only what they feel applies to them is picked out. They are welcome to get what comfort they can, but it is better to look in the Psalms for Christ and His experiences. We get deliverance that way, for we are occupied with another Person and forget self, and these are happy moments. C.H.M. called that the highest stage of christian experience. We need to cultivate it; it is quite possible to be occupied with Christ and with the Father's

thoughts about Him.

As the Spirit of God has introduced in the Psalms the incarnation, the death, resurrection, ascension and coming again of Christ, we are entitled to bring all that into the Psalms and to read them in the light of what subsists in the Spirit's day. That is, instead of reading them in the light of Old Testament piety, we may read them in the light of the present position of Christ, begotten in time, filling up His allotted pathway here, going through death, risen, ascended and coming again. The greatest instruction that God could give us is in the coming in of Christ; and He would also instruct us in the results for us.

Psalm 32 is the basis, the foundation of the Maschil psalms. Without it we would be afraid to look at some of them. God would start every soul with the light of how He has brought in Christ, and of all He has substantiated in Him. We may take up all, even the deepest, soul-anguish, in the light of that. In the history of souls, even of those breaking bread, it is often more like a thousand exercises and coming to Christ at the end, but that is not the divine way. The divine way is to begin with Christ and have all the exercises in the light of Him. It makes all the difference between bondage and liberty. Christ was in the mind of God when Adam was made; he was "the figure of him that was to come." Adam was made like Christ, not Christ like Adam.

In Psalm 32 we find a man under the pressure of God's hand day and night. God is seeking to make him own what he is and what he has done, and He will not let him go until he owns the truth. The longer he holds out the worse for him. He goes through all the exercises of verses 3 and 4, bones waxing old, groaning all the day long, moisture turned into the drought of summer. What a great depth of exercise, and all to make the man confess he has sinned! God cannot bless the unrepentant sinner. It is most important not to miss that, for the preaching of the gospel without repentance gives poor converts,

without moral foundation in their souls. Repentance is a great blessing from God, one of the greatest blessings of the gospel—"that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name." God affords man an opportunity of taking a right place before Him. One man found no place for repentance, but God gives us every opportunity. It is the work of God wrought by these exercises: He brings the subjects of His grace to repentance, and when there is repentance there is the blessedness of verse 1. In its application to us, this implies that we have the Spirit. It is most instructive, because it brings in the knowledge of God as known in the Spirit, forgiveness, non-imputation of sin, and all guile taken from our spirits. You have not to make the least pretence to be anything but what you are: the worse you are the more you glorify divine grace. The Pharisee is very lively in us all; he is always there.

This psalm is the basis of Romans 1 to 5; it leads to blessedness. Romans 4 and 5 answer to this; indeed it is quoted there. Then you are so assured of God's attitude to you and so in the blessedness of it that it leads to prayer, *v.* 6. The forgiven man is a godly man. We see the true godly One, the holy One, in Psalm 16, but the forgiven man is godly, too; he has acquired the character of Christ. I am a forgiven sinner and, as having the Spirit, I have acquired the character of Christ by pure grace.

For the praying man there is wonderful salvation. Whatever pressure there may be, there is a compassing about with songs of deliverance. The godly man has an outlet—prayer. All the power of Satan cannot get over a praying man: the old hymn says, 'Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.' If there is godliness with us, it is in the Holy Spirit, not fleshly. Here there is a praying man who finds God: it is a time when God can be found, He does not hide Himself. "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." Prayer is a great safeguard. A man in blessedness, who

has the Spirit and is godly, who has the character of Christ, will not ask for things to consume them on his own lusts. If I have the Spirit and am patterned after Christ, I must be true to what I am. When God sees a praying man, He says, as it were, "That is Christ." Every true prayer is in the Spirit. There is such a thing as a cry of misery, but true prayer is from a godly person. You may feel you will pray, and when exercised you discover you cannot, and you realise it was something not worth being prayed about. This Psalm would make us wise ones, 'maschilim'; they have a great place in Daniel 11 and 12. Here we see them in the making.

Verses 8 and 9 are connected with spiritual movements. One in the blessedness of the Spirit, who is godly, prayerful, and who knows songs of deliverance, can count on spiritual leading with regard to spiritual movements. This is not exactly guidance in everyday matters, as for example where I should spend my holidays. We are not to be unintelligent like horses and mules; we often have to be constrained into the path of spiritual blessedness. Perhaps we do not seek the knowledge of God and have to be put on a sick bed; that is constraint. The bit and bridle are not God's pleasure, but we must be broken in, be made subject to God. The One who said, "I delight to do thy will," was absolutely subject. A man employed to train valuable dogs was asked, 'When do you consider a dog thoroughly trained?' He answered, 'When I am out with the dog and a rabbit runs across the path, if the dog looks at me first, he is thoroughly trained.' That is the point: the dog is thoroughly subdued and catches the master's eye first, and does not move until he catches it. But what good is it for the eye to be upon me if I am not looking to catch it? I must be broken first and then look to God for guidance. If we are subdued to the will of God we escape all the sorrows of the bit and bridle. That kind of discipline is not desired of God; it supposes there is an active will not in harmony with God's, and it has to be

restrained by outward things. That is not God's thought of instruction, but He might use it to prevent my doing something wrong. For instance, I might break my leg; that is providential and divine preservation, but it is not in itself instruction. Sons get discipline, but these are horses and mules, and we are warned not to be like them.

This psalm is a good start in the school of divine instruction.

PSALMS 42 & 44

C.A.C. We were looking last week at Psalm 32, which is the first of the psalms designated by the Spirit of God as being instruction, Maschil meaning instruction. We were seeing that Psalm 32 is the basis of all divine instruction; that is, the knowledge of God, sins forgiven, not imputed, and the soul in the blessedness which is the result of the presence of the Spirit. Such a soul is marked by godliness and dependence; he is characteristically like Christ. Divine deliverance comes in for him in answer to prayer, and there is direction spiritually, giving the idea of how he is to move in relation to God. This psalm seems to cover the great principle of the soul's relations with God. God is known as Justifier, known in forgiveness, known as Reconciler, Resource and Director of His people. This is the great fundamental knowledge for those whom God has called in grace; it seems the first element of divine instruction. If our souls are not established in this way in the knowledge of God we cannot go on to be instructed ones. God's purpose is to have instructed persons; we have come under His instruction; it belongs to new covenant conditions, "They shall be all taught of God." And we have come under the instruction of Christ, "if ye have heard him and been instructed in him." It is not what we have read in books, or that we have a certain measure of scriptural information, but God's people have

been divinely instructed.

One can see what a difference it makes to begin with the knowledge of God as seen in Psalm 32. In going through even deep and complicated exercises we have a stay, an anchorage in our souls. Psalm 42 indicates deep exercise, but the soul has such a knowledge of God as to confide in Him and to thirst for Him; the soul finds its resource in the knowledge of God. Now we are put to the test. If God gives the knowledge of Himself He puts it to the test; the trial of faith is very precious to God. God likes to put to the test what we have found in Himself, to test whether we have such a knowledge of Himself that we can go on even if deprived of privileges that we have enjoyed.

I think the second book of Psalms shows that though the people are disinherited and driven out, yet they find God to be sufficient. God Himself becomes the portion of a disinherited people.

We come to this—how much do we know God when we are tested? There is an exercise that the soul has to go through in order to get every element of disquietude stilled in the soul. There may be a great many elements of disquietude even where there is peace of conscience. Psalm 32 would establish us in peace of conscience; every moral question settled and God known as an available resource. It is one thing to know God as a resource—we should all admit that—but have we really got the living God? That is very experimental. This exercise has to be faced as to whether we have found such a satisfaction in God that all disquietude of soul is quelled. In Psalm 42 you read of a man who can remember how he went to the house of God with the festive multitude, and the voice of joy and praise. In matters of privilege you can go on with meetings and with the festive character of what obtains in the house of God; you can have spiritual pleasure in that, but John and Paul both lost this privilege. Have you enough to go on with even if you lost it? I do not think any of us could say that we have not had some disquietude

of soul when tested in this way.

John's ministry deals with the state of heart that requires to be satisfied in the knowledge of God, so *thirst* is spoken of. I suppose the living water in John 4 would be the Spirit as bringing the knowledge of God into the soul as complete satisfaction. The knowledge of God in the power of the Spirit is enough to go on with, even if outward privileges fail. In Psalm 42 we have not only the festive multitude—the house of God is properly filled with the festive multitude, for we ought not to come together mournfully—but we have also the reducing exercise connected with Jordan, the Hermons and mount Mizar. I have thought of the exercise of this Psalm in connection with Paul's exercise in 2 Corinthians. We get the blessedness of the gospel in chapters 3 and 4, but then we see every kind of pressure brought in on the vessel to put to the test whether the blessed good which he ministered was enough to carry him through. He finds that God is enough.

Ques. Does that exercise give spiritual increase?

C.A.C. Yes. It is very interesting. There is first the ministry of the gospel, and then we get a tide of discipline brought in on the minister. Then we get the ministry of reconciliation, and then another tide of discipline; the vessel is made to be a witness of the power of what he ministers. It is the living witness of a man who can go through any pressure. There were all kinds of abnormal circumstances and he can go through them in the power of his own ministry; that is divine instruction.

Ques. What is the land of the Jordan?

C.A.C. Paul speaks of death working in us; there is nothing so reducing as death. It is the great reducer; it brings down everything that belongs to us naturally. Paul speaks of being always delivered to death; that is the land of the Jordan. "Always delivered unto death . . . that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh," 2 Cor. 4: 11. It is all practical reduction. If God makes

Himself known in grace and goodness, there is a necessity for reducing, that is Jordan. Hermon is a rugged place; we get rugged circumstances to face. Paul had a good many, all kinds of sharp difficulties. Mount Mizar is a little hill; that is where we are reduced. Paul came to it when he had a thorn for the flesh. All this is the reducing line.

The question in this psalm is whether we have an intense desire to prove what the blessed God can be to us in the presence of all these circumstances which are so reducing naturally. Someone has said that the Lord has set us together in local assemblies for the reduction of the flesh. The thought has come to me sometimes that if I could have the consciousness of the presence of God and His love I could go through anything; that seems incontrovertible. We find in verse 5 the confidence of the soul that there is every kind of salvation in God's countenance, "I shall yet praise him, for the health of his countenance"—the footnote is 'salvations,' that is, there is every kind of salvation in God's countenance. God shines on me; whether it is in the land of Jordan, or the Hermons, or mount Mizar, God is sufficient. Paul said, "My God shall . . . supply all your need"; he was not referring to temporal needs. There was a company at Philippi set for the testimony of God; they were standing shoulder to shoulder with Paul in the defence of the glad tidings. God would be the same whatever the conditions. Paul had found Him sufficient, and he tells the Philippians they would prove it, too. It is not merely temporal needs. "This shall turn out for me to salvation"; that is like the exercise of this psalm. In this psalm you see a man on the way to it, but Paul had it. One great gain of the Psalms is that they show the way to things, but if you want to come to the things themselves you have to go to the New Testament.

Rem. Paul had the sentence of death in himself so as not to trust in himself.

C.A.C. Yes, he had his portion in God though all

outward conditions had failed him. In prison Paul had no privileges of meetings, he was deprived of the fellowship of the brethren, he did not go with the festive multitude.

Psalm 44 is very important, because it is not exactly individual but describes the condition of the people of God. The instruction is that we are not in days when God is publicly supporting His people. If we look for signs of public support we shall not find them; so the psalmist goes back to what God did for the fathers, answering for us to what God did in the times of the apostles, the victorious power of God in the apostles. But now the psalmist says, "But thou hast cast off." We are objects of contempt in every way to the adversary. Are we content to take up this exercise? It is a church exercise. Or do we want to be publicly supported and accredited? That is not at all the line that God is on. He has given us up like sheep for the slaughter; that is the outward position. Some people say they have wonderful things, speak with tongues, heal the sick, or are publicly accredited by God. *We* have to say that we have nothing of the kind. We find in Psalm 44 a people not getting any outward support from God, they are objects of derision, their adversaries regard them with positive contempt, and yet they say, "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely against thy covenant: Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy path." That is the position publicly. Are we going to hold to what is of God, even though there is no outward indication that God is with us? People say, 'Where is your God? You see very little fruit, you do not do anything, there is no sign that God is with you.' People are so ready to say, 'Where is your God?' But if we want to be instructed ones we have to go on without being publicly accredited. We do not want that, we are not to look for public intervention, we are to expect to be given up as sheep for the slaughter. Publicly God does not interfere and we let people do as they like with us. Many an earnest soul would like to be publicly accredited, to have conversions

every day; but it is too late for any company to be signalised or made important in any public way.

Romans 8 shows that all these things do not separate us from the love of Christ. Is the love of Christ enough? Are we content as to the public position to be in derision, contempt, and reproach, but to have compensation in the love of Christ, so that we would rather be in reproach than anything else? The distinction of Philadelphia is "to know that I have loved thee." Our great distinction is to be loved by Christ. We can go on with the remembrance, "yet have we not forgotten thee"—that is the Supper. The Lord commits Himself to us every first day of the week and pledges the fidelity of His love. Is that enough? Are we content to be in public reproach but compensated by the love of Christ? If that is so, it seems to me we shall get a full compensation according to Psalm 45.

We have to remember that Psalm 44 brings in an abnormal condition of things. It is not a day of victory but of public defeat; we go out in defeat publicly. It is what the Lord did, He went out publicly in defeat.

'Through weakness and defeat
He won the meed and crown.'

The Lord says to Philadelphia, "Thou hast a little strength."

Nothing could be more blessed than to be so governed by all this divine instruction that the Spirit of God can make us Christ-centred. We see in Psalm 45 a Christ-centred soul; there is not a word in the psalm that is self-centred. It is all what Christ is, what He will be, and what the assembly is to Him. What a wealth! I do not think it is a wealth that could be known if we had not accepted the instruction of Psalm 44. What is set forth in the next Psalm is so great that it fills the heart; and, instead of the psalmist thirsting, his heart is now welling forth with good matter. We have all the privilege of being composers; we ought to compose something as touching the King. It is a great thing to compose a psalm, although it is good to sing what others have composed!

PSALMS 44 & 45

C.A.C. We were looking at the Maschil psalms, or psalms of 'instruction,' the first of which is Psalm 32. It speaks of the blessedness of forgiveness, of the justified man. It sets forth the knowledge of God as known in new covenant conditions. He is known in forgiveness, in justification; He is known as the deliverer, director, resource and joy of His people. This is exactly what is presented to us in the glad tidings, they bring to us the knowledge of God in that way, and it is made good in the soul on the ground of repentance.

The next Maschil psalm is 42. Psalms 42 and 43 go together. Psalm 43 is not headed, but if you read them you will see that the language unifies them, they are virtually two parts of one psalm. In them we get an instruction of the personal exercise by which God deepens His work in the souls of His people, so that, instead of merely going on with what is public and general, they should have a definite soul link with God personally. It is one thing to go along with what is general, identifying ourselves with the people of God and enjoying what they enjoy—"I passed along with the multitude"—but God wants to give us something more. It is very nice to pass along with the multitude, especially to the house of God, but that is something that we may be deprived of, and God wants to establish something in our souls that we cannot be deprived of, something in definite personal exercise, so that if we are deprived of the outward we may have joy in Him. The man in Psalm 42 is led to have intense desire after God; he has been deprived of what he enjoyed with the multitude and now he has intense desire to have something for himself so that his soul may be preserved. In Psalm 43 we have indicated how it is reached. "Send out thy light and thy truth: *they* shall lead me, *they* shall bring me to thy holy mount, and unto thy

habitations. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto the God of the gladness of my joy." This man has the truth of Psalm 32 deepened; God has become more intensely and personally his joy than when he first heard the gospel. It is only deep exercise that will give us Psalm 43, deep exercise as well as the work of the Spirit; there is no deep thirst for God apart from the Spirit. We have all known what it is to have been with the people of God, to have fallen into our place in the meetings and shared their joy; we have enjoyed things with the festive multitude, but in the ways of God we may lose that, we may have to learn what the Jordan is, what the land of the Hermons and mount Mizar are. We may have distress and pressure, all the things that reduce us and make us feel how little we have of the knowledge of God in our souls. It is what a man might feel when alone in prison. Many of us know what it is to have a disquieted soul when in circumstances that bring us down! There is not a believer here so young as not to have had a touch of it; but God's object is to give us all the grace of the glad tidings in a deeper way. The psalmist says, "Send out thy light and thy truth: *they* shall lead me." It is one thing to be led by the brethren, and quite another to be led by God's light and truth.

What a deepening it is when God sends out His light and truth and *they* lead us! We have something that does not fail, and then we come to God's tabernacle and altar. We are not carried by the multitude, but are carried along by our own personal experience to God, our exceeding joy. It is like a schoolboy going home for the holidays! There must come a moment in our souls when we feel that going along with what is general does not do. The soul has intense longing for God, and you feel you must have Him for your own satisfaction. You feel that merely going on with fellowship and love—sweet as it is—does not satisfy you. The goodness of God brings us to that. What a source of strength amongst the brethren is a brother or sister who has come to this! God's light and truth have

come to that soul and it has moved into the tabernacle of God through its own exercise, and has found God to be the source of exceeding joy. This is definite power that you cannot lose; it holds good if you are in prison, if you are isolated from the brethren, or sick, or laid on your back. What you have learnt cannot be taken from you.

In Psalm 44 there is another instruction. The soul can say, We have heard what wonderful things God did for His people in the past, and He is not doing these things now. What an exercise! It was once all victory, under Joshua, but now, "But thou hast cast off . . . Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a mockery and a derision for them that are round about us." The psalmist is referring to all the people of God. In presence of exercises like that the soul learns to be faithful to the covenant. Though the conditions are changed, it is much like this in the times of the assembly; it is an assembly exercise in this psalm. We are not now in days when nothing can stand before the people of God. It is now a day of reproach and contempt like the days of Nehemiah when they said, "if a fox went up, it would break down their stone wall," Neh. 4: 3. The Israelites were objects of derision, and that is our portion today—we have to learn this, and I doubt if anyone will be stable for God if he does not learn it. What are we to do in times of reproach? Verse 17 tells us, "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely against thy covenant: Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy path." That remains for us even though publicly it is a time of reproach. God puts no distinction on us publicly, but we go on with the remembrance—the Supper—and fidelity, and we do not turn back from anything that has been marked out as the testimony of the Lord. We have the peculiar exercise of 2 Timothy, not only normal exercise. In Romans 8 we get the normal suffering that christians have to suffer, but now we have the abnormal suffering of 2 Timothy, the last days: we have the public

reproach in which the christian profession is found, and the special reproach attaching to the faithful. Are we prepared to go on steadily through outward reproach and contempt? What is the gain of such a path? The consciousness of being inseparable from the love of Christ, and when that comes into the soul it prepares us for Psalm 45.

We have to be prepared for the path of public reproach. We hear it said, 'There are wonderful things going on here, we have a thousand converted in our place, why do you not join us?' Others say, 'We can heal the sick and speak with tongues, we have everything as it was at the beginning.' There is human glory attached to that. If you want that you will fall into the hands of Satan. We have to accept reproach; Paul in prison is a pattern of the place of the testimony today. An evangelist once said to me, 'We should preach in the finest buildings in the land,' I replied, 'Judging by Scripture I should rather expect to see the evangelist locked up in the county gaol.' The testimony has always been in reproach, but there is a different aspect of things now. In the apostles' day all the power of the world to come was there. We have not apostles now going about working miracles; the apostles turned the world upside down, but we have not anything like that now. If brethren had gone on without any division there would have been no reproach, but the history of divine movements in the assembly and the way they have worked out has resulted in our being in reproach. People say, 'You are all cut up, no one knows how many parties there are.' We are objects of derision; but are we prepared to go on with the covenant and remembrance and not to turn back? On that line we should have our hearts full of Christ. Things are now committed to faithful men, and I include women in that. No other kind of persons would have their heart full of Christ. We sang the hymn just now, 'Our hearts are full of Christ.' Is it true, or do we desire it? I could sing it in the form of prayer, and many

other hymns I can sing in the spirit of prayer with an intense desire to be in the truth of them. Hymns are an indication to me of the line on which every desire can go. Hymns are like the permanent way for the train to run on; the desires and affections of the saints can travel along them.

Psalm 45 is perhaps in one way the centre and the crown of the Maschil psalms, because it indicates to us that God can reach such a blessed end with His people that their hearts are full of Christ and of what stands in relation to Christ for His pleasure. Nothing could be more blessed. This psalm is Christ as He will be known publicly in the world to come, and it is that brought into the hearts of the saints before the time arrives. Before we are in the world to come, the world to come is in us. "The world to come, whereof we speak"; *we* means all christians. What else have we to speak about but the world to come? What have we to say about this present world? There is no room for Christ in it. We talk about the world to come because God and Christ are going to be supreme in that world, and God and His Anointed have become supreme to us. Instead of being thirsty our souls are welling up and overflowing.

Ques. Who is the speaker in Psalm 45?

C.A.C. That raises a very interesting point. The speaker is plainly not God; it is not God telling us about Christ. In the gospel God tells us about Christ, but here it is the heart of a man and the tongue of a man. It is a man speaking about Christ, and that man might be any of us under the power of the love of Christ. The compensation for the position in Psalm 44 is that we get to know our inseparableness from the love of Christ, and if we have found compensation we can compose something: "I say what I have composed." Did it ever strike you that you can compose something about Christ that has never been composed since the day of Pentecost?

It is a great thing to be in the position of lilies. Shoshannim means lilies (see heading of psalm). The lily

in Scripture is a figure of the distinctive place that the saints have at the present time. The Lord in the Song of Songs says, "As the lily among thorns, So is my love among the daughters," chap. 2: 2. That is the position today. You may say, 'I know plenty about thorns pricking me and tearing my flesh'; but it is the thorns that give distinctiveness to the lily. How distinctive would a lily be among thorns! In a bed of lilies they are all alike, but contrariety gives distinctiveness. It is like Philippians 2, "harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation." That gives distinctiveness; it is the saints' appreciation of Christ that gives it; that is what makes me a lily if I am one. A lily would symbolise purity, a purity of affection that takes account of Christ, and would say, 'My heart is full of Christ and longs its glorious matter to declare.' The soul in this psalm is really doing that. What a wonderful thing to be liberated so as to say, "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer." In the affections there is a composing of things so that, as we know Christ and appreciate Him, we can speak of Him as He will be known in the world to come. The epistle to the Hebrews deals with the world to come; the beauty and adornments of Christ as He will be known in the world to come are known now in the hearts of the saints.

Here we see God instructing us in what is most precious to God Himself. To give us a thought of Christ is more pleasurable to God than anything else He could give us. He is filling the soul with thoughts of Christ and teaching us comparisons; He teaches us to recognise the immense superiority of Christ to the sons of men; we have to learn that. It is not that He is superior merely to the sons of Belial, but to the sons of men, those who have fairness Godward, like Enoch, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David. It was said of Moses that he was "fair to God," and all the other saints of God have been fair to God, but the One here is fairer, Christ is fairer than the sons of men. That

is, what you see in a saint is of the same order but infinitely surpassed in Christ. We see a spiritual feature in the sons of men, but dimly at the best; there is a dimness about it, but you see all the features in undimmed perfection in Christ, so He is fairer than the sons of men. He takes that place before the heart; He surpasses everyone. We find in this psalm how He transcends even His companions, He is anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions. The more we see His features in the saints the more we can appreciate in a transcendent way what we see in Christ. Everything that is fair came from Christ. Suppose I see any feature that is fair in a saint, if it affects my heart rightly it leads me to the fountain, to the One in whom that and every other feature is seen without a flaw. It is not comparing Him with the wicked sons of men, but with those who have had fairness before God; and we have to learn under divine instruction to give Him that place, the transcendent place. The bride in Canticles says of the Beloved, He is "The chiefest among ten thousand." Even the saints disappear then, none of the sons of men could be altogether lovely, but He is "altogether lovely." In all things He has the pre-eminence; we see it on the holy mount. It was not two wicked men who had to disappear, but Moses and Elias. Peter had learned this, so when the Lord raised the question, "who do ye say that I am?" he was able to answer. Others said, John the baptist, or Elias, or Jeremias, or some other man who had fairness. They were all men who were fair to God, but He was fairer, and Peter says, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Matt. 16: 16. He was far beyond all the others. The bride in the Song of Songs says, He "is my beloved." What a delight for God if such thoughts as these of His beloved One are expressed truly by any of our hearts! This psalm is a song of the Beloved, not only His moral perfections recognised, but He has become the Beloved of our hearts, He has become to our hearts what He is to God. He is God's Beloved, and He is ours. How

we are bound up in intimacy of affection with God and with the Beloved!

Up to this point in the psalm we have the Vessel; He surpasses, and transcends, and supersedes everything in this world that has divine beauty and fairness in God's eyes. I used to read this verse as referring to the natural man, but it has helped me to see that everything that has been beautiful for God, "fair to God," is transcended and transfigured in this One. Now, God says, as it were, 'This is the Vessel whom I am going to fill with my grace that He may express it to you.' "Grace is poured into thy lips." We see the Vessel first, what He is personally, and then grace poured into His lips. In that perfect One all the precious thoughts of God are expressed towards men; all was put into that Vessel so that it might flow out to you and me. This is the gospel of Luke; He is seen there as the Vessel, not the Source. We see the Vessel, and then what was put into it, and the delight of God in Him stands in that connection. In Proverbs 8 divine wisdom speaks as the nursling of God's love, "I was daily his delight"; but in what connection? "Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." God's delight in Him is in connection with the fact that God has expressed in Him all His thoughts of grace towards men in this world. So at His baptism when the Lord took His place with the repentant remnant, it was just *there* and *then* that God opened heaven to say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight." Just when He was taking His place with men, God finds His delight in the Vessel of His infinite thoughts of grace. God would fill our hearts with thoughts of Christ. Think of the grace in the gospel of Luke, in chapters 4, 5, 7, 14, 15, 16 and 23; it is a very flood-tide of the heart of God, the grace of heaven expressed in Christ! It will be publicly known in the world to come, and, wonder of wonders, we know it now.

"Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever," *v.* 2. He

has made Him blessed for ever; that carries us to the new position in which He is found. All the grace of which He was the Vessel here still subsists in Him as the exalted and glorified Man, blessed for ever at God's own right hand. This is the whole subject of testimony in the beginning of Acts. Whatever was expressed in Him as the Vessel of grace, a lowly Man, is all expressed in Him as the glorified Man.

Everything in Psalm 45 is Christ-centred and Christ-filled, and this is the true fruit of spiritual liberty. If I have learned the lessons of Psalms 42, 43 and 44, this is the condition of soul that I shall be in; and if I am not in that condition it is a matter to pray about. And we can pray with no uncertainty, for it is the mind of God that we should have it, and He has brought us under divine instruction that we should have it.

In the world to come God will bring in publicly truth, meekness and righteousness; and if they are not accepted in the way of divine instruction they will be brought in in divine power. The sword and arrows, *vv.* 3 and 5, come in so that these blessed things, truth, meekness and righteousness, should be brought in to fill the earth. But these are things that have come into the hearts of the saints now. If truth and meekness and righteousness have place in my affections, the world to come is in me, though I am not yet in the world to come.

Psalm 45 answers in a way to the epistle to the Hebrews. That which will irradiate the world to come is the glory of Christ, and though it is not public now, we have not to wait; we can now see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. We can see Him in His glory and kingdom, and stand in the most intimate and personal relation to Him. It is a wonderful thing to have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord; it would emancipate us from everything that is not Christ. The question is, What sort of matter is my heart engaged with? The psalmist speaks of a good matter and the things touching

the King. What an immense thing to compose in our affections something in regard to Christ and to have our hearts filled with this good matter! God has expressed all that Christ is and all His grace in a Vessel of incomparable beauty and preciousness and attractiveness. There is One fairer than the children of men, One who transcends them all, not simply the children of fallen men but those who have had divine beauty, even an Abraham, a Moses, a David; He transcends them all. "Grace is poured into thy lips"; God has put all His favourableness to men as a testimony in the lips of that blessed Man. It has come to us in the midst of all our distance and unbelief. God has brought in everything suitable to Himself, and everything attractive to the heart, in Christ; He is without a rival, without a peer, He stands alone! That is the One in whom God has brought His grace near to us and God has blessed Him for ever, God has glorified Him because He is so excellent.

God is bringing in truth, meekness and righteousness. God will make everything give way to Christ, and, if it does not give way to the attractiveness of His Person and His lips, it will give way by sword, and arrows, and the strength of His right hand. God has taken us each up according to His eternal purpose to make everything in us give way to Christ and to develop in our souls those features of Christ that are suitable to Him. Truth, meekness and righteousness are the features of Christ, so these are things to obtain. The power of the kingdom lies in these things, as brought out in verses 6 and 7, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom: thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions." It is wonderful to see what the kingdom does as vested in the Son of the Father's love. It brings us to love what Christ loves and to hate what Christ hates. The kingdom is vested in that Person, so we

cannot come under the influence of Christ without loving what He loves and hating what He hates; and the measure in which that is true is the measure in which we have come into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love. In this kingdom it is never arbitrary rule. What a wonderful kingdom where the subjects love what the King loves and hate what the King hates! They would be fit companions for Him. It is just what we get here; the kingdom exists that the King may have companions. He wants companions who are morally all of one with Himself. We could not entertain the thought of the assembly if we had not a generation like that; we have the kingdom thought first, before the thought of the queen. The influence of the kingdom is the great thing; authority might be arbitrary but influence is not, it is moral or spiritual. In no aspect of the kingdom is the authority arbitrary, it works morally by God bringing adequate influences to bear upon us. It is a system of liberty and love, not bondage. It is a wonderful thing to get the consciousness of being suitable to be companions of Christ.

Ques. Who says in verse 7, "God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness"?

C.A.C. I suppose the saint who is in the spiritual vision of it. The woman who anointed Him at the end of the gospels had the sense that He was the anointed One, and if He was God's anointed One then He was her anointed One too, and she poured out everything on Him. The thought of anointing introduces the thought of fragrance; it is that aspect of anointing here. We are accustomed to look at it too much on the official side. It is official when the priest is anointed and when the king is anointed, but in this psalm it is not His official anointing; it is the oil of gladness—one does not think of that as being official. He has companions in joy, those who are invested with some of the fragrance that belongs to Him. I do not think we could anoint Him without becoming invested with some of His fragrance. The woman in the gospels put

some on Him, but she carried some away with her.

The point in this psalm is what is known privately before all that Christ is is known publicly. We are inside, within the royal apartments in this psalm—"All glorious is the king's daughter within." She is not said to be glorious without; it is in the seclusion of the spot where Christ is known and enjoyed, where divine thoughts are known. "Myrrh and aloes, cassia, are all thy garments"—it is the fragrance of the Person. There is a peculiar delight in apprehending the fragrance of Christ; it is something different from His moral perfections. We are all prepared to say that He is fairer than the sons of men; there is every moral perfection in Him as loving righteousness and hating lawlessness; He is suitable to be the expression in Himself of the kingdom of God. But in fragrance there is something subtle; all His garments are imbued with the anointing that is put upon Him. If the priest is anointed and the oil runs down to the hem of his garment he becomes fragrant. We have the same spices here that were put in the holy anointing oil. It seems to me that the fragrance of Christ came out peculiarly in His death.

It should affect our spirits, and one longs increasingly that one's spirit should be affected. We are converted, and we give up things outwardly wrong, and we come among the people of God, and fall in with a certain conduct and manners, and perhaps there is something for the pleasure of God in that; but how far are our spirits affected? How much is there of the fragrance of Christ about us? God is the Father of spirits; He is not so much concerned about our conduct as about our spirits, because if our spirits are right, our conduct will be. My spirit is what I am, it is the true *I*.

It is blessed to think of the fragrance of the Person brought out in death. In the New Testament the myrrh and aloes are identified with Him as lying in death; they were brought by Nicodemus, and are not mentioned in Matthew, Mark or Luke; they are reserved for John. In

Matthew, Mark and Luke the linen is emphasised, its purity in Matthew, and its fineness in Mark and Luke, but these spices are not spoken of. That suggests to me that the spices are connected with His Person, so we might expect to find them in John, and a hundred pounds weight of the spices is brought there. They are identified with Him as lying in death. We have the fragrance of such a Person as John presents lying in death. Matthew presents Him as the trespass-offering; Mark as the sin-offering; in Luke He goes into death in the grace of God; but in John it is the Person. What a fragrance of suffering love connects itself with the Person! There is a rare and peculiar fragrance, and we cannot help feeling how little we know of it. We understand and know a little as to the value of His work, but God would affect us greatly by the fragrance there was in His beloved Son lying in death; the Lord would lead us to appreciate the whole fragrance of His Person as brought out under the eye of God in His death.

Ques. Is it the same thought as a sacrifice for a sweet-smelling savour in Ephesians?

C.A.C. Yes. "Even as the Christ loved us, and delivered himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour", Eph. 5: 2—it is the fragrance brought out. The assembly—the queen—is formed in the appreciation of that.

Ques. Would Esther help as to that?

C.A.C. Yes, she was purified with precious spices. The Lord wants a bride whose inmost sensibilities and emotions and feelings are in correspondence with His own, not only morally but in this indescribable fragrance.

The great thought in this psalm is that we are for His delight; it is not what we do. It is the relationship of each company to the King; whether it is the companions, or the queen, or the virgins, they are all in direct personal relationship to Him. We need to cultivate an intensely individual sense of our relationship to Christ, that we love

Him and He loves us; it is an intimate personal thing. We think a great deal about our being affected by His love and company, and we may be, but there is another consideration. How is He affected by our love? He is touched by it. He has told us He is greatly affected by our love; He is so affected by it that He will come to us. He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter," John 14: 16; and then further down He says, "I am coming to you," *v.* 18. It is as if He said, 'If ye love Me I will come to you.' Do you think the Lord would keep away from His people as gathered together affectionately to Him? He could not keep away, He would be so affected that He would come to them. I should like to know something of His delight in the love of His own. In the Song of Songs the beloved is arrested by the love of the bride. Do we give the Lord credit for really loving us?

I have thought in connection with this fragrance that, while Scripture identifies the myrrh and aloes with Christ in death, there is very little to identify the cassia, and I wondered if it might refer to all the fragrance of Christ in manhood which was carried through to resurrection. There was that in the Lord which could pass unchanged into the resurrection sphere. While the Lord has laid down His life and passed out of the condition of blood and flesh there is an immense blessedness disclosed in Him as man on earth that is unchanged in resurrection. Take His joy, His delight in God, His love to His people, all His affections, everything that ruled the soul of the Lord. Scripture speaks of His soul, "Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol"—all His inwardness was carried without a change into resurrection. This is of great importance to us, because all that is of a spiritual order with us can go without a change into resurrection. There can be a fragrance about us now that would not suffer the slightest change if we passed into resurrection, it would be something that cannot be changed. The Lord would

exercise us about so partaking of the fragrance that attaches to Christ that we should be acquiring qualities and features that would go right through to resurrection. What we cannot carry through would not be of much importance. In the christian circle we are occupied with things that can pass unchanged into the resurrection sphere. For example, suppose I can praise God, will not that go through to resurrection? If I love God and Christ and the brethren, will not all those spiritual affections and emotions go through to resurrection? That is why the Lord is so concerned that we should enjoy eternal life, because none of that will be left behind. We can acquire something that is altogether different from that which attached to us when we came into the world. The queen is in gold of Ophir, she has a new vesture that she never had before. Have we taken into account the fact that we are set up in an entirely new way to be suitable to Christ, and that the greatest things of all are freely given to us of God? The prodigal is the best illustration of it; all that belonged to him by nature was self-will and self-indulgence, poverty and rags, but that is all gone and there is an entirely new beginning, everything for the father's delight; the best robe, the ring, and the shoes. Everything is perfect and is of God, so he goes into the house as an ornament of the place, an object of delight of the father's house. The queen stands in gold of Ophir, nothing is there that belongs to what is natural, it is all spiritual. It is interesting to see in this psalm the intimate relationship that is established. You do not find the queen in the Song of Songs; there the marriage is not consummated, the feminine speaker's affections vacillate, answering to many of our experiences. But in Psalm 45 you have reached the stability of affection.

We were looking last week at Psalm 45, it is Christ as He will be known in the world to come. It is our privilege to have the blessed knowledge of Him beforehand, both of what He is personally, and of the precious grace poured

into His lips and expressed in Him as a Man on earth; and of His place in glory. God is teaching us that everything is to give place to Christ. If place is not given to Him under the power of grace and love, it will be with swords and arrows; His enemies will be made a footstool for His feet.

We must not look for outward distinction amidst general departure, but we ought to look for increased knowledge of Christ, to have that favour. Outwardly we are in the weakest possible position, but inwardly we can have this blessed knowledge of Christ that marks the wise.

We were speaking last week of the myrrh and aloes being in reference to the sufferings of Christ; all that pertains to His Person has come out in the greatest fragrance in His death, so every office He fills, every service He does, every glory that attaches to Him as Man is affected by His having lain in death. This fragrance attaches to Him as having been in death. In the ways of God all that belongs to Christ has acquired fragrance through His death. The King has had to be the Sufferer, and the fragrance that attaches to His Person has come out in death; all His perfections have come out in sweet odour before God. Now all those who love Him perceive it; "all thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia." They carry the fragrance of the love that took Him through such amazing suffering and sorrow—the King has become the Sufferer. The King has companions, too; He has not only subjects but companions who love what He loves and hate what He hates, and who are mightily influenced by the way He has gone. We have learned how He loves righteousness. He would die to establish it; and He hates lawlessness, He would die to put it away. Everything that is reached on our side for the comfort and pleasure of Christ is secured at the cost of death. He has reached everything through death, and everything in us for the pleasure of God is reached in the same way; and

that is why we get ivory palaces.

"Out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made thee glad." There is the thought of ivory palaces being secured for Christ, and every bit of the material of such palaces has been secured through death. The elephant is a fine animal, but its ivory is only secured through death. My impression is that every palace for Christ is secured through death. On what principle can we secure ivory palaces for Christ? It must be by putting to death our members which are on the earth; we must use death as a weapon. It is our mortal members as in Colossians 3. Each of us might live on the same principle as people of the world, we might use everything for self-gratification, move on the lines natural to us, indigenous to our nature, but there is nothing for Christ in that. The lover of Christ has learnt to bring death on all this, to secure something for Christ, an ivory palace for Him. Every bit of ivory speaks of death. Which would we prefer, to move on lines of self-gratification, or to provide an ivory palace for Christ? Suppose there is something that I might do as a man living in this world that would gratify me, but instead of that I apply death to it because I would like to secure a palace for Christ. It is just as the affections work that something is secured for Him, just in proportion as our affections work is a palace secured, and out of them "stringed instruments have made thee glad," they can minister to His joy. Should we not like to secure something for the joy of Christ? It is most appealing for the youngest. Naturally we could not think of an ivory palace, but we have to think of it spiritually as a place of reception for Christ, every part of which has been secured by bringing in death on what is natural to us, bringing it in in the power of affection. People often try to do it without the power of affection, but this psalm is the language of a lover; he has found sufficient in Christ to make Him a commanding interest. That Person is a commanding object, and in that affection we can prepare an ivory

palace; it is open to the youngest to do it. In that ivory palace there are stringed instruments, in the power of affection there is response to Christ. Think of the possibility of having something in our affections to make the glorified Christ glad! We can minister to the gladness of Christ. We have to be very jealous about it, for a stringed instrument is very delicate and easily goes out of tune; it has to be carefully adjusted. No musician would use a violin as it was left from the last time it was used; he must have it carefully tuned. If we have an ivory palace and stringed instruments we have to watch very carefully that our affections do not go out of tune, that the music is not flat, for we are called to minister to the joy of Christ.

We have looked at what Christ is before our eyes, but now what are we for Him? We have seen His personal glory, His official glory, His kingly glory, now what is for His pleasure? That brings in the subjective side. We have the great privilege of providing stringed instruments, but we must come under the hand of the Chief Musician again and again to get tuned to the right standard of quality. This is one of the psalms for the Chief Musician; it is a question of how the music sounds in His ear. Think of music to sound in Christ's ear!

There is nothing that would tune our spirits like the Lord's supper, like the fresh presentation of Himself. The great advantage of being a lover is to get manifestations of Himself, it is by them the Lord tunes the instruments. I do not think we should think of manifestations happening once in a hundred years! Many think it was only J.N.D. and J.B.S. who had them, but it is the normal movement of Christ toward every obedient lover; it is the normal course of supreme and blessed love. He could not withhold Himself from a lover. If I do not get manifestations I am not much of a lover. I do not know how it comes about, but the Lord is able to bring Himself in a very real and spiritual manner before us so that our affections get a frest start, a fresh impulse; the instrument is

tuned. But if there is no ivory palace, there are no stringed instruments. You must learn to apply death to what belongs to you naturally as a child of Adam, and you do it in the power of affection because you want a place for Christ. Every bit of ivory has to be secured at the price of death. How much have we secured for Christ at that cost?

We can see how all this gives us a moral basis for the truth of the queen. Christ has companions morally who love righteousness and hate lawlessness; they are marked by such affection that they build ivory palaces and have stringed instruments in them. Put these thoughts together and you will have some idea of what stands connected with the subjective side. In the last part of the psalm we have kings' daughters, the queen, the daughter of Tyre, and then pre-eminently the king's daughter. It is all the feminine side, the subjective side, what there is in the saints for the heart of Christ. It is wonderful instruction if we want to be for Christ in these last days just before the kingdom comes in publicly. One might say that this psalm speaks of Christ and the assembly; the assembly now comes into the place of the queen and the king's daughter. No doubt, strictly speaking, it applies to Jerusalem; she is to be queen, her name is to be Beulah—married, and God will rejoice over Jerusalem as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride.

Rem. At the present time the bride is a city.

C.A.C. Yes, and the queen is a city, the Messiah's queen will be a city, the King must have a city. The assembly has that place now. When John was called to see the bride he was shown a city, teaching us the thought that the bride and the city are put together by the Spirit of God.

Ques. Does the city suggest government?

C.A.C. There is no doubt an administrative side to the city, but the thought here is that the queen is for the delight of the King. The assembly comes to be for the satisfaction of Christ in carrying all the features which

belong to the city; they are set forth figuratively in the city, but they are what gives the city attractiveness to Christ.

We get first the thought of kings' daughters, suggesting the saints as of royal lineage; we are suitable to Christ because of the exalted character of our lineage. Have we learned to think of ourselves as kings' daughters? Think of the exalted character of the saints as born of God! We have a spiritual lineage which fits us to be in this wonderful relationship to Christ. John says, "*Ye* are of God"; that is our origin. "*Ye* are of God, children, and have overcome them"—the saints are of such lineage that they have power to overcome antichrists. It is interesting to put the different thoughts together. The queen stands in gold of Ophir; lower down her raiment is of wrought gold, and then she is in raiment of embroidery. There are three different thoughts, but all made good in the saints.

Ques. What is gold of Ophir?

C.A.C. I thought it suggested glory as conferred by divine grace. In the coming day when Israel will be recognised as the delight of Jehovah she will be brought into the enjoyment of God's favour in Christ; this will result in public glory answering to the gold which will be recognised by the nations around. In christianity the ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit involves that believers are invested with glory which is to shine out in testimony. It is said in 2 Corinthians 3: 11, of this ministry that it subsists in glory. There is thus a subsisting glory about the saints as having received the Spirit as a ministration from God.

The wrought gold is more what is formed in the saints. We receive righteousness and the Spirit absolutely, as the two great blessings which God is serving out to all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. But wrought gold suggests formation, the work of God which begins when we have received righteousness and the Spirit. If you would like a scripture for wrought gold

I would suggest Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3; I do not know a better. There is a strengthening by the Father's Spirit in all the affections of the inner man so that the Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, and it is all to apprehend with every believer "what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge; that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God. But to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, according to the power which works in us. . . ." Now you have the wrought gold; it is brought into shape by prayer. I believe what is wrought of the Spirit is wrought under deep exercise, and every exercise turns to prayer. Our prayers are the measure of our spiritual exercises, and what is wrought of God is wrought in an atmosphere of prayer. That is where God works. We cannot be divinely wrought by listening to ministry. "He that has wrought us for this very thing is God," 2 Cor. 5: 5. One asks oneself, How big am I in view of being placed in the heavenly city? That is the measure of how I am divinely wrought. A great many have righteousness and the Spirit, but there is very little exercise and prayer, very little seeking from God, so there is little spiritual formation, only a little bit of pure gold to go into the city; there is nothing in the city but pure gold. How big am I for that city? Just so big as I have been divinely wrought, and nothing goes in but what has been divinely wrought. God is working in saints so that they may be fit material to go into the city.

These two thoughts are helpful, showing how we are invested with divine glory, but also how we become subjects of divine workmanship. Then the third thing is the raiment of embroidery; that brings us to our side. It is wrought stitch by stitch. Revelation 19 tells us it is granted to the bride to be clothed in fine linen, the righteousnesses of the saints. The raiment of embroidery is made by the practical working out in detail of the life of Christ in the saints. Nothing has the character of righteousness

but what flows out from the life of Christ in the saints. It is a matter of daily exercise, and this garment is worked out day by day; all that is the product of the life of Christ goes into it, all that has the character of righteousness before God goes into it. It is connected with, "the Spirit life on account of righteousness," Rom. 8: 10. The Spirit has come in to be the power of life so that what is righteous has place with us and that is morally the life of Christ.

There is a divine working in the saints, and that is like wrought gold, but there is a working out in practical result, and that is our side of it.

Ques. Is it what the virtuous woman does in Proverbs 31?

C.A.C. She is diligent in the detail of life, stitch by stitch.

God would suggest all this to us by way of instruction for the last days, and we have to take it up if we are to realise the portion of the wise in the last days. Psalm 45, is in one sense, the most important of the Maschil Psalms because it deals with the Person of Christ, and with what is for Christ's pleasure.

PSALMS 52—55

C.A.C. The general thought that has been before us in reading these Maschil psalms is that we find in them conditions in which the people and the testimony of God will be found in the last days. They are given by the Spirit of God to be a support for faith and for love in the last days before the kingdom is established. It is noticeable that very few of the Psalms and very little scripture is occupied with the kingdom as actually established. The greater part of the Scriptures, including the Psalms, is occupied with exercises and experiences, the sufferings and triumphs of the people of God in days when evil has

outwardly the upper hand, and the kingdom is in anticipation.

In the four psalms read tonight we come to the conditions in the presence of which testimony is to be maintained—faith is the resource. No doubt in principle we have to go through the same exercises as the instructed ones in Israel; it is necessary for us to be wise as it will be for them. It is very important to be instructed so that we take up the testimony of God in an intelligent way. If we have appreciated Christ and what stands in relation to Him according to Psalm 45, we have now to learn in Psalm 52 that we are face to face with the most deadly opposition. The mighty man in verse 1 is in deadly opposition to the people of God. No doubt the psalm refers to Doeg the Edomite; he represents the man that serves the flesh. He was Saul's chief servant, the man who ministers to the flesh. He had no appreciation of God's anointed, and was ready to kill that which had holy and priestly character—he slew eighty-five persons wearing the linen ephod; 1 Sam. 22. He was ready to kill the priests. We are face to face with that mighty man.

In Psalm 45 we have learnt the excellence of Christ; God fills our hearts with composition concerning Him. He excels every other man, and everything glorious stands connected with Him. Now antichrist is dead against that, and we are morally in the times of antichrist "even now," 1 John 2: 18. We are in the presence of many antichrists, though *the* personal antichrist has not yet come. What will keep us in presence of the mighty man? There is a mighty man here in deadly opposition to God's anointed, and to everything that is holy and priestly in character. How are we to be sustained? The way the Lord would sustain us is by making us green olive trees in His house. Nothing short of being spiritual men and women will do in a day like this. An olive tree suggests a spiritual man bearing spiritual fruit; and there is freshness, a *green* olive tree. He is not a visitor to the house, he is planted

there in the soil of God's lovingkindness. The place in which to grow and be fruitful is the soil of God's lovingkindness in God's house. We see the contrast in Psalm 37: 35, "the wicked . . . spreading like a green tree in its native soil." That refers to antichrist, who is the full expression of what man can be as growing in his native soil, as growing up from what he can be for himself. The air is full of the spirit of antichrist now, what man can be for himself; what will meet that? Only the character of the spiritual man and woman who are drawing everything from God's lovingkindness and proving what He can be for men. It is men living as Christ did in absolute dependence and trust. Christ proved at every step what God can be for men; He was the green olive tree, but every saint can be one. The very ground that the house stands on is God's lovingkindness.

In the exercises of Psalm 51 we learn the lovingkindness of God. Psalm 45, which is full of Christ and the product of the work of God, necessitates the exercises of Psalm 51, because the more I appreciate Christ, the deeper down I have to go in self-judgment, and there is no deeper exercise in self-judgment than Psalm 51. God does not let anyone off that exercise, but it is in it we learn the lovingkindness of God. There is a man in Psalm 51 full of failure, not only what he has done but what he is, but he learns that the lovingkindness of God can be counted on in the lowest depths; and if it can be counted on there it can be anywhere. Our knowledge of God's lovingkindness is measured by our self-judgment. Peter had to learn what he was capable of, and we all have to; it is a fixed principle with God that we must. Peter did not believe what God said; and the psalmist had probably written many psalms before this, and now he has to go this way that he might learn God and justify Him, so he says, "that thou mayest be justified." A spiritual man is one who has appreciation of Christ and is self-judged. If you put Psalms 45 and 51 together you get the two sides of a spiritual man—a great

appreciation of Christ and deep self-judgment. All the wise have to learn these lessons. I do not mean that we have to commit a great sin to learn it; that is not the deepest way of learning it. We can learn it in the presence of God, and it is to teach us the lovingkindness of God. The text of Psalm 52 is verse 1, "The lovingkindness of God abideth continually," and verse 8, "I will confide in the lovingkindness of God for ever and ever." That is the confidence of the soul.

Ques. How would you distinguish between lovingkindness and love?

C.A.C. The lovingkindness of God comes out in relation to conditions in which His people are found. It is a beautiful word, often translated 'mercy,' but it is really *desire* or *ardour*. It indicates the warmth of God's disposition towards men that He would delight to be their resource, to be their support in spite of the creature's sin. His love is behind it, but it is more how He would put Himself at our disposal; He is so kindly and tenderly disposed to men—we should be planted in that. The appreciation of Christ deepens self-judgment and confidence in the lovingkindness of God, then you have a green olive tree in the presence of antichrist. This psalm will be fulfilled in the presence of antichrist, but it can be anticipated now. There are no half measures; we are either growing in our own native soil or planted in the house of Jehovah.

Rem. "Abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house," Ps. 36: 8.

C.A.C. Yes. "How precious is thy lovingkindness, O God! So the sons of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings," *v.* 7. That is one of the most beautiful scriptures one could have. The sons of men can come right up to the mercy-seat and put their trust in the wings of Jehovah, and God is so known as the Source of everything that "they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house."

No doubt David went through the experiences that

qualified him to be a vessel for God to use; but in principle these psalms apply to us. Without this instruction we cannot stand before the power of antichrist that makes everything of man grown out of his native soil. In the testimony of God the only thing of account is a green olive tree in the house of God, a man who confides in the lovingkindness of God continually.

It is in presence of a Man fairer than the children of men that we learn to judge ourselves. Then we find in Psalm 52, in contrast to the mighty man who grows out of his own soil, the spiritual man, beautifully designated a green olive tree in the house of God, trusting in the lovingkindness of God, drawing everything from God, proving what God can be for man—just as Christ did.

In the next psalm, 53, we find the universal condition of man is brought to light. Men universally are in such a condition that every influence that emanates from them tends to eat up the people. "Eating up my people as they eat bread," *v.* 4, is the character of the influence that emanates from men; it is destructive and pernicious, and it accounts for the captivity of the people of God; they have come under the influence of things that emanate from men. There is a necessity for the captivity to be turned, *v.* 6. Every one of us has known what it is to come under the influence of what emanates from men; it is a spiritual captivity, and there is a necessity for it to be turned and for salvation to come out of Zion. We all need this experience.

Ques. Do you mean the teachings of men?

C.A.C. I was thinking of all influences which have ended in the captivity of the people of God. They began before the apostles left the scene, they come from men, not from God, and the result is that the whole christian profession has come into captivity. Just what happened to Israel has happened to the christian profession, so in sovereign mercy we must be delivered from all that emanates from men. If our joy is not full it is because there is some

element of captivity about us. There is a great element about many of us; we are governed inwardly and it affects us outwardly; we can see an amount of outward captivity and we want deliverance in our spirits. "Salvations" (see footnote to N.T.) come out of Zion. In sovereign mercy (Zion speaks of that) God calls attention to something in our walk, or ways, or spirit, or service, or religious associations that is not Himself but emanates from men. God calls attention to it so that salvations may come in one after another to set us free. God will turn the captivity of Jacob and Israel; He has been turning our captivity for the last hundred years so that there might be profound joy in our hearts. We cannot have it unless we have the salvations out of Zion.

Ques. Is that why our meetings sometimes lack joy?

C.A.C. Yes. If there were more spiritual joy, what a spring there would be! The great point in the next psalm, 54, is the freewill offering and praise; priestly service is carried on. No power of the enemy can hinder that, but, if we have not power through the captivity being turned, we are not free for service.

Rem. Paul in Philippians 3 was free.

C.A.C. Yes. "*We* are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus." That is like Psalm 54. There is a man there whose captivity has been perfectly turned; salvation has liberated him from everything.

Now these things are essential for the wise, we have to take them up in personal exercise and spiritual power.

In Psalm 54: 6 the point reached is, "I will freely sacrifice," or, 'sacrifice a free-will offering.' "I will praise thy name, O Jehovah, because it is good." The power of the enemy is set to hinder God from getting His portion; there is violence on the enemy's part. Our brethren, the remnant, will have to suffer that in a terrible degree, and we may yet have to. In recent years the enemy has sought to hinder by violent intrusion, and we may have more of

it; we ought to be prepared to face the possibility of the enemy being allowed to hinder in that way. Before the church goes she may have to pass through exercises that will qualify her to sympathise with suffering brethren of the time to come.

Ques. Do you mean outwardly?

C.A.C. Yes. Satan will do anything to interfere with the service of God. But I think we have to remember that the service of God is never to cease in the darkest and direst time of the great tribulation; and the service is to go on now. We have to think of the dignity, the holy privilege of being allowed to stand by night in the house of God, and carry on His service and lift up our hands. We ought to think more of God's service; we are often thinking of our blessing instead of the sacrifice of praise. I think all these things are like the sap of the olive tree; they are the activities of the Spirit of Christ. The enemy is bringing pressure to bear so that the service of God may be hindered. Have you not noticed on Lord's day morning how something will happen to upset your spirit? Satan would like that, and we have to see to it that we do not succumb to his efforts.

Ques. In what sense is praise sacrifice?

C.A.C. It is bringing before God what He finds delight in, bringing Christ before Him. Even in our private devotions we ought to think of it; we are so much on the line of our need. I find I go to pray, and one thing after another comes in in connection with my need, and state of soul, and service, and time goes on and I have to pull myself up and say, Is there to be nothing for God, all for me? I begin to think I must have a sacrifice, and I think what I can say to God about Christ; then one taps the spring of divine power and joy, one passes over to what is sacrificial. The service of God is connected with magnifying Him in presence of all that He has disclosed Himself to be. The enemy would like to bring some influence to stop that. Why are there so many silent brothers? The

enemy cannot destroy, but he knows that if he stops the service of God he practically destroys, and the wise have to learn not to allow the service to be stopped from any source. It is our highest privilege, and it is that in which the glory of God is bound up. The glory of the assembly is that it is a shrine for God's glory. In touching the blessedness of the house of God there would be a great impulse. We are weak because in private prayer every day there is so little praise; but the joy of captivity being turned would lead to delight in God and there would be more praise. What an extraordinary thing it is to forget our exercises and allow our hearts to dwell adoringly on the lovingkindness of God, and on the beauties and perfections of Christ! If we did this in private what would it be when the assembly came together! One can hardly imagine it.

The next psalm, 55, is the deepest exercise of all in one sense; it is the exercise of church troubles, which come from inside. Many here tonight can bear witness that they have gone through deeper sorrow and exercise about church troubles than anything else. Did you ever wish you had wings like a dove to fly away and be at rest? All these troubles are what you get *in* the city, *v.* 9—see also verses 10 and 11. They are assembly troubles. The remnant will have internal troubles in the day to come which in one sense will be worse than the outward. "For it is not an enemy that hath reproached me—then could I have borne it; neither is it he that hateth me that hath magnified himself against me—then would I have hidden myself from him; But it was thou, a man mine equal, mine intimate, my familiar friend. . . . We who held sweet intercourse together. To the house of God we walked amid the throng," *vv.* 12—14. It is the brethren who have failed you, and that is the keenest sorrow of all—many could bear witness that they have gone through sleepless nights over this, more than they did over anything else. We get the remedy in verses 22 and 23—confidence in God.

The psalm refers to the time of Absalom's rebellion when he stole the hearts of the people. A plausible, flattering tongue was exercising an influence among the people of God, contrary to the truth of God. Probably Ahithophel was the familiar friend. We meet this sometimes; a man we consider as one enquiring of the word of God and speaking as an oracle—and yet he fails and becomes an adversary. What a grief! A most weighty brother and yet he has failed us! We have to be prepared for these things; they belong to the exercise of the last days. We have to be prepared for trouble "in the city" and "in the midst"; and we have to be prepared for the defection of brethren who have helped us and given us the counsel of God. What can we do? "Cast thy burden on Jehovah, and *he* will sustain thee: he will never suffer the righteous to be moved . . . as for me, I will confide in thee," *vv.* 22, 23. That gives comfort and encouragement. We have to learn the lesson of confidence in God, He will never allow the righteous to be moved; they will be carried through every church trouble and escape the influence of Ahithophel; they will be carried right through.

PSALMS 74, 78, 88, 89 & 142

C.A.C. The first psalm, 74, that we read has remarkable reference to the assembly—"Remember thine assembly, which thou hast purchased of old, which thou hast redeemed to be the portion of thine inheritance," *v.* 2, "Everything in the sanctuary hath the enemy destroyed," *v.* 3, "Thine adversaries roar in the midst of thy place of assembly," *v.* 4, "And now they break down its carved work altogether, with hatchets and hammers. They have set on fire thy sanctuary, they have profaned the habitation of thy name to the ground," *vv.* 6, 7.

This is a psalm that brings out in the most striking way the desolation of God's assembly, God's sanctuary. We

have to feel it; we are living in days when the language is as appropriate as it ever could be in Israel. It is a great point of spiritual progress when we realise the present state of ruin, looking at things in a spiritual way. In an outward way it is not a state of ruin; there are magnificent buildings, beautiful services, large congregations; but if we are to take account of things spiritually we are surrounded with a most dreadful state of desolation. The christian profession today has the name of God and of Christ attached to and connected with it, but what about the spiritual element? If we gather up from Holy Scripture the spiritual elements connected with God's assembly, His temple, His sanctuary, we learn the holiness of these things as set up at the beginning. If we get a spiritual estimate of God's assembly, temple and sanctuary, we shall see that the present state of things exactly answers to this psalm. The holy things are profaned; the service of God is profaned, it is carried on for the pleasure of man in a way that commends itself to men and all the beautiful spiritual ornamentations are broken down—"They break down its carved work"—things were set up with beautiful ornamentation. God's assembly is here and all the things spoken of have their place, but in the hands of men they have been profaned and their holy character lost. Where is the holiness? It has often been pointed out that we get the adversary within and the enemy without. There have been destructive influences operating against the assembly from without, but the most deadly influences are from within. Think of how the assembly was ornamented at the beginning with all the gifts in the distribution of the Spirit, gifts of an ascended Christ; and then all the fruitful activities of spiritual affections in the saints. What a beauty of holiness, what a fervency of love there was! The assembly was full of spiritual beauty and ornamentation, but the enemy went to work to break it down, and instead of spiritual elements material elements were set up. So in the christian profession today every

part of the truth is imitated and put in a material, instead of a spiritual, form. People talk of a church; they mean a material building. There is no such thought in Scripture. It is always an assembly of living persons. The whole spiritual beauty of the thought of the assembly is destroyed, broken down; and bricks and stones are looked at as a church. The Lord's supper in its simplicity and beauty is God's means of convening the assembly, but instead of the saints coming together in the beauty of the assembly it has disappeared publicly. The enemy's effort has been to introduce natural and material elements instead of spiritual. If we could get hold of the fact that God's house is spiritual, and all the elements are spiritual, it would be the greatest help to us, and we should see how that which is spiritual has been profaned and destroyed in the public profession. I think the divine remedy and refuge is brought out very beautifully in these psalms. We have to watch that we are cultivating what is spiritual and discarding those things that have led to the state of christendom. I remember saying long ago to J.B.S. that I had found in my heart the germ of every kind of corruption and departure; we have to learn that. If we give place to it, it will destroy every spiritual element, and obliterate all the spiritual beauty that attaches to God's assembly. We have not to look at what others are doing, but we must guard against all these elements that have come out publicly in christendom, for they are in each of our hearts naturally.

I think we have to learn according to Psalm 78 how God falls back on His own sovereignty when everything publicly is a failure amongst His people: in sovereign mercy He secures everything from His own side. Psalm 78 is a parable: "I will open my mouth in a parable," *v.* 2; it answers exactly to Matthew 13 where it is quoted. It is very remarkable that the Spirit of God has linked this psalm with Matthew 13, where the Lord expounds the parable of the sower and then gives the similitudes of the

kingdom. First from verse 24 the parable of the good seed being sown and the enemy coming and sowing darnel amongst the wheat; and then in verse 31 another parable of the grain of mustard seed "which a man took and sowed in his field; which is less indeed than all seeds, but when it is grown is greater than herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches." Then the next verse is the parable of the leaven, "which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until it had been all leavened." And then there is a parenthesis, *vv.* 34, 35: "All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and without a parable he did not speak to them, so that that should be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the world's foundation." At this point the Lord brings in Psalm 78, and after that He speaks of the treasure and the pearl. The psalm is an Old Testament parable; it shows how everything goes to the bad in the hands of men. The divine testimony and the law as committed to men only result in departure and unfaithfulness; and when that is fully manifested the Lord awakes and takes things in hand, and He starts everything from Zion, *vv.* 65—68. He has a chosen place and a chosen Man, and everything works out from the divine side in connection with sovereign mercy and the integrity and skilfulness of Christ, *v.* 72. At that point you can turn from the history of departure.

We see the history of departure in Matthew 13. It begins with the enemy sowing darnel; and then there is the mustard seed; that is what is of God taking an unnatural place in the world and becoming a shelter for wicked spirits; finally the whole is leavened—it is a picture of the enemy's work. God begins and then the enemy works till the whole is leavened. This is exactly what is going on now; darnel has been sown, and the christian profession has taken this extraordinary place in the world

as a great and imposing thing when it was never intended to be anything but small; and there is the corrupting influence of the woman who puts in leaven until the whole is leavened. After this there are the treasure, the pearl and the good fish. This comes in on the line of mount Zion and David, the principle of sovereign mercy.

I think Psalm 78 is connected with God's testimony: "He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children," *v.* 5. It is a question of God's testimony. Now we all admit that in the matter of individual blessing it must be sovereign mercy, but when it is a question of God's testimony it must be sovereign mercy, too. It all works out in connection with Christ, so at the end of this psalm we get a chosen place and a chosen Man; it is a question of the integrity of His heart and the skilfulness of His hands. Christ is, like David, feeding the people of God according to the integrity of His heart. Do you think He would fail to feed them with every divine food that God has provided? He has such integrity of heart in connection with divine feeding. You may find servants who keep back some food and do not serve out the whole truth, but that would never be so with Christ. If we put ourselves into His hands we shall be well fed and guided. Our security is to be fed according to the integrity of His heart and guided by the skilfulness of His hands; we cannot make a creed or doctrine that would afford security.

It is a great comfort to me to think that whatever has been for God in relation to His testimony has been the product of sovereign mercy, and because of that it will never fail—there is something there. We might get discouraged if we look at the first similitudes of Matthew 13, the enemy's work bringing in bad material, and in result things taking public shape and becoming leavened. But the Lord says, 'I will tell you something else; there is a treasure and a pearl.' How full of instruction these great

principles are!

In verse 65 we had a striking figure of God's intervention, "Then the Lord awoke as one out of sleep"—there has been something like that in the history of the church. The Lord has awakened to show His own hand and His way of working. And He is showing the result of His intervention, that everything that abides and has value is the product of His sovereign mercy which has been secured in a risen Christ, and nothing can invalidate that. Mount Zion refers to that, to what is secured in a risen Christ. God has had to disown everything that had been the result of human failure, but, if He disowns that, there is something else that He chooses—mount Zion. It is our privilege to move on the line of what is of God, and in that way we shall find resource and strength. We are not called to put the confusion right or to accommodate ourselves to it, but to go on with what is of God.

Rem. We get guidance in Psalm 32 also.

C.A.C. That brings out the great principles of God's favour and leading. He will never fail to give His people spiritual guidance when they want it. People think many are ready for it who do not get it. I do not believe that there are any souls prepared for divine leading who do not get it; when a soul is ready it surely will get it.

In Psalm 88 we get a more personal exercise; it is the most hopeless psalm in the book. J.N.D. said that at one time it was the only scripture that was any help to him because he saw that someone had been as low as that before him. It was the only part of scripture that tallied with his experience, and if any man had been as low there was help for *him*. Psalm 88 is the Old Testament Romans 7, it is the experience of utter weakness in oneself; the man in it is as good as dead. It is a solemn experience and instruction, but in principle we need it in the last days. We need to know, not only the public breakdown as in Psalm 74, but that in regard to God we are as complete a mass of weakness as if we were dead. We are looking at

it in connection with the testimony, and we have to learn that in ourselves we have the weakness of death; it is not wilfulness here but the weakness of death. It is learned in the presence of God.

Psalms 88 and 89 are like Romans 7 and 8. There is a learning of utter weakness in Psalm 88 to prepare us to appreciate Psalm 89: "I will sing of the lovingkindness of Jehovah for ever; with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness from generation to generation. For I said, Lovingkindness shall be built up for ever; in the very heavens wilt thou establish thy faithfulness." The whole of this psalm is built up on lovingkindness and faithfulness: each are mentioned seven times in the psalm. If you have learned your utter weakness in Psalm 88 you come to lovingkindness and faithfulness in God. What a stay to the heart to learn these things as divine instruction! We have all to take up these exercises and God brings us to it. That is why we have church difficulties. Every exercised person who has faced church difficulties has learnt his utter weakness; nothing would discover our weakness to us like assembly exercises or difficulties. It is God's way that we should learn our weakness in order that we should fall back on what is established in heaven—God's faithfulness and lovingkindness.

Ques. Is it the individual or the company learning it?

C.A.C. I think we have, every one, to learn it individually. Paul's thorn for the flesh brought death on him, and it is on that basis that God can show His power. If there is a bit of activity of what belongs to me it excludes divine power. We all like to be strong on that line, but God brings in power by reducing us to the weakness of death, and then He opens out His lovingkindness and faithfulness, and shows how He has laid help on One who is mighty. "Then thou spakest in vision of thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon a mighty one," *v.* 19. Now we learn God's covenant with Christ—God has made His covenant with David—Christ is the subject of the

covenant and anointing, and He is One who is mighty; there is no weakness to interfere with the carrying out of divine pleasure in Christ. There are certain engagements on God's part with reference to Christ that cannot be interfered with or invalidated. For instance the kingdom is secured to Christ by covenant; God has said, "Ask of me, and I will give thee nations for an inheritance, and for thy possession the ends of the earth," Ps. 2: 8. The kingdom is secured to Christ, the divine pledge is given, "Sit at my right hand, until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet," Ps. 110: 1. Then the priesthood is secured: "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek." All is secured to Christ. What a comfort to see that Christ is anointed with the holy oil and is mighty! Nothing committed to Him can ever fail, it will be carried through. What a comfort in the presence of the gross and shameful failure that marks the christian profession to be able to fall back on such a covenant! Christ came here to do the will of God when the whole sacrificial system had failed. He came to do the work and could say, "I have glorified *thee* on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it." All this makes God's lovingkindness and faithfulness as secured in Christ very precious to the heart. We are able to retire from all the breakdown of the christian profession in which we are involved and responsible; we can retire from our utter weakness into the region of the Spirit and of God's lovingkindness and faithfulness, and of the ability of Christ to give effect to the whole pleasure of God. What a resource in these last days! This is great instruction for us.

This will be the provision for the remnant of Israel in a coming day; they will have to take up these lessons in the tribulation in presence of the antichrist and the beast, in far more terrible conditions than we do. We have to learn them now in our conditions, which in the last days will become worse, but what a resource to fall back on!

The last Maschil psalm is Psalm 142. It shows the extreme point to which any faithful saint can be reduced; he is left without any companion, and no man cares for his soul. But Jehovah is his refuge. This exactly corresponds with Paul's experience in 2 Timothy: "no man stood with me." It contemplates the very worst conditions there could be; it is conceivable that things might be so bad that we might have to stand alone. It was the Lord's portion: "they all forsook him." This psalm contemplates the direst distress in which a faithful saint could be found; but the Lord has pledged Himself to the assembly that we shall never have to walk alone. 2 Timothy is the pledge; we are told to "withdraw from iniquity" and separate from vessels to dishonour and to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." There is a divine pledge to us that we shall never be reduced to walking alone. There will always be those following righteousness, faith, love, peace, and calling on the Lord out of a pure heart.

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